

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

June 2023 Minutes

Meeting Date: June 13, 2023

[Link to meeting recording](#)

President Elizabeth Sanfelippo called the June 2023 meeting of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association to order at 6:00 pm. She welcomed everyone and introduced herself as President, Judy Jones as Vice President adding that Jones was filling in tonight for Secretary Kelly Marshall who was unable to attend the meeting tonight.

Birmingham Fire and Rescue

Sanfelippo asked that the Fire Department staff present go ahead and give their update so they could get back to their work. Lieutenant Middleton of Station 22 shared they average about 300 calls per month and that 93% of those were medical problems, and most of those were related to falls. She said their safety focus area for the month is 'grilling'. She highlighted the need to store lighter fluid away from children, be sure that charcoal cools off before disposing of it, be sure propane tanks remain outside of the building and check them for leaks.

Roll Call

Sanfelippo performed a roll call of online attendees as required by city.

May Minutes

Sanfelippo asked if there were any corrections to the May meeting minutes. Richard Kiell moved to approve the minutes for the May meeting. Ray Davis seconded the motion. A vote was taken, there was no one opposed, the minutes were approved.

Friends of Highland Park Contribution Request

Sanfelippo told residents the neighborhood had a request to make a contribution to Friends of Highland Park from our neighborhood funds. She shared the funds balance right now was roughly \$58,000. Sanfelippo said she would confirm with the city whether the balance reflected two approved neighborhood projects (mulch for Rushton Park playground and the 31st St. S. speed tables). Sanfelippo said the request was for \$1000 to support the organization's crosswalk signage project for the neighborhood and was recommended by the neighborhood's spending committee. Sharon Nelson moved to approve the \$1000.00 expenditure to Friends of Highland Park for crosswalk signage. Eddie Johnson seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken, there was no opposition and the motion passed. (see later notes of vote count taken.)

People's Budget Birmingham/Gabriel Caban Cubero

Sanfelippo introduced the speaker for this evening, Gabriel Caban Cubero, Campaign Director for People's Budget Birmingham (PBB). Cubero shared that they were also a Highland Park resident. They said People's Budget Birmingham was a campaign that was

started in 2020 and founded by several local organizations. Cubero said in 2020 they launched a survey to ask constituents in the city how they wanted the Birmingham city budget to be spent. Cubero said since then they have shifted from a hard coalition model to something more grass-roots controlled. They said people who have volunteered or worked with us are able to become part of their leadership. Cubero said their goal is to get feedback from the residents in the city on how they would like their tax dollars to be spent. They said it has been a challenge because the relationship between city government and its constituents is ruptured. Cubero said they knock on doors and have real conversations with people. They said they do legislative advocacy (they would love to enact participatory budgeting within the city of Birmingham) and education (host trainings and teach a variety of topics). Cubero said they are very much research and data driven, making sure to track everyone they have a conversation with. They said they also release reports and findings from the research they do. Cubero said neighborhood associations are incredible structures in that they create a participatory process in which people can have a say on what is going on in their neighborhood. Cubero said they would love to partner with neighborhood associations, especially now at the end of this budget cycle, because they will have a year to engage people in the effort and gather information.

Cubero was asked when the most recent report/analytics would be available. They replied they would be forthcoming. They said if people wanted to see the types of information that will be available, they could look at the previous report at www.PeoplesBudgetBirmingham.org. They said site visitors could also take the survey there as well, though it would not be included in this year's report.

A resident asked if the city pays any to the organization. Cubero said they had been successful getting the city's attention in the past but that their goal really was to get constituent's voices on paper and at the mic, communicating their preferences.

A resident asked to hear Councilwoman Abbott's opinion on the group's work. Abbott said she thought the group had improved how they worked. She said the only mistake she thinks they make is waiting until the budget is published and on the table before they say anything. She said the mayor's staff probably starts on the budget in January. She said once they give it to the council, it's a done deal, that the council can't change anything in the budget without the mayor's agreement. She said council members can refuse to pass the budget unless changes are made but typically council members would choose not to ruin their relationship with the mayor. She said she thinks it would work better to get people's attention ahead of time, before the departmental budget hearings so that the information gathered by PBB can be included in deliberations earlier in the process. Cubero said there is no public process for the formation of the mayor's proposed budget until the one chance that constituents get, according to the Mayor Council Act, which they think is 20 days after the Mayor's budget is proposed publicly. Cubero said it is difficult to get access to what is going into the budget five months before that. Abbott says the way the process starts is that departments are asked to create the 'budget of their dreams' and the council doesn't really know what they asked for, only what ultimately is in the mayor's published budget.

Judy Jones asked 'isn't one goal of the PBB to educate the public on the budget process?' Cubero replied yes, it pretty much stinks that the public has one opportunity in 365 days to offer feedback on the 'budget'.

A meeting attendee, non-resident, said she is concerned at hearing an elected official tell the people she represents that the only power she has is to vote the mayor's budget up or down, that she has no authority to change anything about the budget presented by the mayor. She said the council members have the ability to communicate with their legislators. She said she understands how we got here, with the Mayor-Council Act but is concerned that one branch of government, the mayor's office, is dictating what will be done in the City of Birmingham. She said the idea that the people here don't even know when the budget year starts, that they don't know how to ask questions before it is published, is an issue. She said for our elected council members to be reluctant to challenge the mayor because they are afraid he will take away funding, that's a dictatorship. She asked Councilwoman Abbott, since the pandemic, if the Council had reached out to the Jefferson County delegation for them to review how it is working - and at least consider giving the city council some voice in the process. Councilwoman Abbott said they have done this and have pretty much been blown off so far. She said when she was president of the Council, they had gotten the mayor to agree to support it going back to the way it was. She said he very quickly changed his mind. Abbott said for anyone who wants to take the time, there is a lot of information online that relates to the city's finances.

Being no other questions, Sanfelippo thanked Cubero for attending the meeting tonight.

City Council Update/Councilwoman Valerie Abbott

Sanfelippo introduced Councilwoman Abbott. Abbott said today was Council day. She said they approved a \$553,000 contract for Rickwood Field renovations, which the city has neglected for years. She said they also voted to sell a large piece of property in Daniel Payne Industrial Park. Abbott said she knew a few people used to ride the bus that went down Highland Ave - and then the BJCTA did away with the route. She said because of this decision, they agreed to extend VIA (the city's 'on demand' riding service) to the Highland Avenue area. Abbott said they also gave the Bus Rapid Transit to the BJCTA and they are trying to figure out how to meld that system into their fixed route bus system. She said they are developing an app that will facilitate transfers from a fixed route bus to one in the other system without having to pay a fee. Abbott said current projections have the app ready by yearend. She said they voted today to give the City \$300,000 to cover the bus fares so that when someone is trying to get somewhere now, they pay one fare. She said if someone wants to ride from CrossPlex to East Lake now, they can ride for free until the end of the year.

Helen Rivas voiced a concern saying that when she had a difficulty getting a VIA ride, she couldn't get anyone on the phone to help her resolve her issue and asked who she should call in a situation like that. Abbott said she would just call Councilman Darrel O'Quinn's office and ask for help.

Abbott asked if people living around St Vincents were still having problems with patients and workers parking in front of their houses, taking up their parking? Sanfelippo said she thinks it has subsided a bit. She said she did recently speak to neighbors on 28th and took their concerns to James Fowler. Abbott said the Mayor's office has come up with a plan to do away with parking requirements for new development.

Abbott said she has concerns that if the city removes the minimum parking requirement from new developments, that people will park in adjacent residential neighborhoods. Abbott said she has asked that before they change the ordinance or before they recommend to the Council to change the ordinance, they come up with the Residential Parking Zones that were discussed about 3 years ago and that we have been waiting for ever since. She said we should go ahead and get that in place so when we have a problem, we're not scrambling around trying to figure out why people are having to walk 3 blocks with sacks of groceries to get to their house. A resident told Abbott that several things (completion of construction, the new lot across from McDonald's) had helped the situation but there was still an issue. She thanked Abbott for her continued concern about the plight of 28th. Abbott said she didn't expect the issue to go away unless people get rid of their cars and she didn't see that happening. She said she wants to have a plan for Resident Parking Zones before the problem gets here. Sanfelippo asked who in the city should be contacted by residents with concerns. Abbott said the two key people to contact are the Mayor and the head of the Birmingham Department of Transportation, James Fowler. She said they need to hear that residents want to see Resident Parking Zones, repaired sidewalks, bike lanes and a functional transit system before telling developers they don't have to have parking any more. Pat Byington asked if there was a vote pending by the Planning Commission on this very issue and if it would help if we lobbied this group. Abbott said yes it would. She said we were supposed to hear it last Wednesday but we didn't have a quorum. She said they were trying to reschedule a meeting for perhaps tomorrow, that they seem to be in a big hurry to do this. Abbott says she believes this is the wrong way to go about this, that we should fix things first, then change the ordinance. She said most of the neighborhoods being affected by this proposed change are in District 3. A resident shared the Planning Commission meeting has been rescheduled for next Tuesday at 4:30 pm.

Crosswalk Signage Vote

Sanfelippo reminded the group of the earlier voice vote for the \$1000 allocation for the crosswalk signage – and that the city may prefer a 'count' to make it official. Sanfelippo took the vote which was 17 for the \$1000.00 allocation and none opposed. Sanfelippo asked Judy Jones for an update on Friends of Highland Park's crosswalk signage project. Jones said the campaign started as an effort to raise \$7500 to place 15 stanchions in Highland Avenue crosswalks. She said the group has bought and placed five and currently has the funds to purchase several more. She said the word is getting out, people are being supportive. Jones said they want to create some signage that tells residents and walkers that if they like these signs, they can contribute 'this way', and include a QR code to contribute. A resident asked how much the stanchions cost. Jones said between \$300 and \$400. Ray Davis shared they are a little over \$400 with shipping but when they order multiples, there's a break on shipping

cost. Jones reminded all the contributions were tax deductible. Sanfelippo said instructions on how to donate were in the Highland Park newsletter.

OLD BUSINESS

Sanfelippo thanked everyone who came out for our neighborhood clean up day. She said we had a great time and the neighborhood is looking great! She said the piles hadn't been picked up yet but that she hoped they would be within the next day or so.

Sanfelippo pointed out we have started including 'action items' at the end of the minutes. She said we are continuing to follow up on 311 issues, tickets that seem to magically disappear or that get 'resolved' when nothing has actually happened on them. She said Alicia Lumpkin with the City is helping us with this – and if anyone has examples of this happen, to let us know, adding it will be helpful if we have the 'case number'.

Sanfelippo provided updates on previous 'follow-up' items:

Re Park Lights: We are apparently 'up next' on the list for these installations. She said we've been waiting a couple of years on this, so it's great news

Re Rushton Playground Mulch: No substantive update, hopefully we are close on this

Re Sidewalk Project: We are waiting on more info with respect to our follow-up with the city

Re Neighborhood Sign Bollards (around the neighborhood sign near the Sirotte building, knocked down in a vehicle accident): We are awaiting follow-up by the city and Sanfelippo would also get with Judy Jones on that issue.

Re Pending New Automated Garbage System: Currently working on a Community meeting to get Public Works to come and speak about the new system – that residents are pretty certain will not work in Highland Park.

New Business

There was no new business.

Announcements

Sanfelippo told the group there was bad weather expected tomorrow and to stay safe.

Sanfelippo announced that Rojo will celebrate its 21st on Thursday with a band and champagne on their patio. She said the festivities will start at 6 pm.

Sanfelippo announced that the city will be closed Monday June 19 for Juneteenth, adding that emergency services will be working as usual. She noted that the neighborhood included related Juneteenth events in the newsletter.

Sanfelippo said recycling is back, the next pickup will be June 21.

Next Meeting

Sanfelippo said our next meeting will be July 11 at 6 pm, both in-person and virtually.

The meeting was adjourned at 7 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Judy Jones
VP, Highland Park Neighborhood Association