

# Highland Park Neighborhood Association

## November 2023 Meeting Minutes

**Meeting Date: November 14, 2023**

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

Sanfelippo told the group she was tonight collecting messages from Highland Park residents (online and in person) for retiring long-time Highland Park patroller Officer Charlie King.

Sanfelippo asked if residents had received a link to the October meeting minutes. She asked if there were any corrections to the minutes. Diann Weatherly moved to approve the minutes for the October meeting. John Somerset seconded the motion. A vote was taken, there was no one opposed, the minutes were approved unanimously.

Sanfelippo performed a roll call of online attendees as required by city. She told the group we wanted to try something a little different with the online attendees, asking them to sign their name(s) in the meeting 'chat'.

### **Beautification Committee Funds Request**

Sanfelippo told residents the Beautification Committee, chaired by Ray Davis, has made a funds request of \$3000 for 16 native trees, mulch for the trees and delivery. Sanfelippo said this expenditure received a positive recommendation by the HPNA Spending Committee. Phillip Foster moved to approve the \$3000 expenditure. Sylvia Swayne seconded the motion. There were 16 votes for the motion and none opposed. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Speaker - Dana Hazen\City of Mountain Brook**

Sanfelippo introduced the evening's speaker, Dana Hazen as the City of Mountain Brook's Director of Planning, Building and Sustainability. Hazen said she would also be talking on behalf of Recreative Natives, a Cropwell nursery specializing in propagating plants native to Alabama. She said she would be talking about a handful of these plants and offering a few fall tips.

Hazen shared a definition of 'native plant' - as 'a plant that has evolved within the context of a local ecosystem; a plant that has not been introduced from an ecosystem outside the evolutionary homeland. Hazen stated that native plants matter because 'introduced plants' 1-

do a poor job at supporting native insects and insectivores (species that eat insects) and 2- displace native plants. She explained 'keystone species' as a plant species whose absence makes an ecosystem collapse, that this species supports 80% of the insect species in its locality.

Hazen said she was going to talk about 4 keystone plants tonight that are easy to obtain and do so much of the work in Alabama. She said the first two are Goldenrod and Aster, both late fall bloomers so are important sources of food and nectar for insects and late-migrating Monarchs. Hazen said the Goldenrod is a super important pollinator because it supports 181 insect species. Hazen said she needed to point out the difference between Goldenrod and Ragweed. She said everyone blames Goldenrod for season allergies - but Ragweed is actually blooming at the same time, often right along side it. Hazen said Goldenrod pollen grains are large and sticky and do not float on the wind. The culprit is Ragweed whose pollen is carried by the wind. Hazen said we really need to crush the myth that Goldenrod is responsible for allergies reactions because it is really one of the most important keystone plants in North America. Hazen went on to Asters, sharing that this plant supports 109 insect species. Hazen shared she was making this powerpoint presentation available to Sanfelippo to be able to share it if requested.

Hazen next talked about Black-eyed Susans, which she said are a type of coneflower. She said this plant species supports 20 species of caterpillars and 29 species of 'specialist' pollinators. She went on to the Purple Coneflower saying that it was also a very strong pollinator host. Hazen shared there are a lot of woodland and native Sunflowers in Alabama and they support 66 insect species. She moved into shade plants, pointing out shrubs Bottlebrush Buckeye, Smooth Hydrangea and Oakleaf Hydrangea and woodland flowering plants Smooth Solomon's Seal and Little Sweet Betsy. Hazen said she believes that Jessica with Recreative Natives carries all these plants.

Hazen said she wanted to leave the group with a couple of important 'ponderings' for the fall. She said 'leave the leaves' because once caterpillar larva eat their fill of leaves in the trees, 94% fall to the ground in the leaves beneath the tree. The caterpillars then either spin a cocoon in the leaves or burrow into the ground to complete pupation. Hazen said the thing we don't want to do is maintain a pollinator garden all summer - then in the fall, blow or rake the leaves, bag them and send the leaves (and the hibernating pollinators) to the landfill. She said we want to create soft landings underneath the trees. Hazen explained by removing leaf litter we are disrupting the life cycle of moths, butterflies, bumble bees and fireflies. She said you can rake the leaves off the lawn into your planting areas and let it sit there - but do not use leaf blowers. Hazen said to refrain from tidying the fall garden, explaining that to the extent that you can, save plant stems, that bees are often hibernate in them and butterfly and moth cocoons are often attached to them. She said tidying less is creating an important habitat for overwintering. She said it's a good idea to get a sign for your yard or garden to let your neighbors know you're being intentional about the condition of your yard. Hazen said

when you go to buy a plant or seeds to sure that it's not been treated with chemicals, that sometimes this is hard to determine with local garden shops. She said it's really important to start your pollinator garden with plants that have not been chemically planted since chemicals stay in the plants.

Sanfelippo thanked Hazen for attending the meeting tonight. She introduced Laney DeJonge. Laney told the group she had attended the same event as Hazen, when Doug Tallamy spoke at the Botanical Gardens. She said they both attended a native plant conference in March and both became enthusiastic advocates. Laney said it's important to remember that birds don't just eat seeds, that they also eat insects. She shared one nest of chickadees requires 6000-7000 caterpillars. She said if we keep planting only grass and crepe myrtles, the caterpillars aren't going to be there. Laney said residents don't have to plant only natives, that a great goal is to have 50-70% of what's in your yard native. A question was asked about apartment dwellers. She said if you live in an apartment you can put plants on your balcony to provide nectar for species coming by. Judy Jones said there will also be project opportunities in the neighborhood that apartment dwellers can volunteer for and that represents a contribution to the effort and our community. Laney said we were going to try to focus more on natives in the garden plots in the park. She encouraged people to talk to their landlords or condo communities, pointing out that Ray Davis at Park Tower had successfully encouraged the planting of natives there. Laney said her organization, Homegrown Habitat, has been working with the city's horticulture department to get the Highland Park medians planted with native plants. She said they have learned the medians were built around 40 years ago and loaded up with landscaping plants popular then, for example, Chinese holly. She pointed out Chinese holly does nothing to support native species. Laney shared plans for Highland Park medians developed by Lea Ann Macknally with Macknally Land Design. Laney said Macknally has done a number of native plant projects at Railroad Park and 20<sup>th</sup> Street for the World Games, Protective Stadium and Pratt City - and therefore has extensive experience with what grows well in the urban context. Laney said they initially thought they would do the medians at the entrances to the neighborhoods but the city recommended doing a 'section' - to simplify the possible repair and use of sprinklers. Laney said one point of natives was reduced watering requirements but it was good to have water available the first year after planting to help them get established. She once established natives actually use less water. She shared some of the plant selections for the medians - black-eyed susans, sunflowers, grey-headed coneflowers, oakleaf hydrangeas, adding Macknally's designs would accommodate the shade and sunlight needs of the plants selected and their locations within the medians. Laney said the idea is that these designs can be used for the other medians and possibly in other parts of the city like Bush Hills. She said it will be great for the city to have a framework to begin planting native in more areas, noting Highland Park has already communicated to the city a priority of planting natives. Laney said we need to be sure the city has an opportunity to propagate more natives. She said with the exception of a few crepe myrtles they have now removed all the non-natives from medians that will be planted in this first phase, the city is enriching the soil and making it ready to plant. She said

they will also get rid of any dead or dying trees in the medians, saying any tree with a white ribbon is staying. Laney said they will also add stepping stones so people can walk across the medians without damaging plants. She said they may begin planting in February. A question was asked about visual branding, explaining the project. Laney said this is definitely something they want to do, pointing out the signs downtown and at Railroad Park have been very helpful and educational to explain what is happening with plant cycles. Laney said the group has a QR code they can use as well. She said they would also like to work with the city on how the parks manage the leaves during the late fall and winter to provide more 'soft landings'. Laney said it would be good if the parks included more 'native plant' areas. Someone suggested using solar lights for the signage. The point was raised that too many lights were bad for insects. Laney said white porch lights kill bugs and are disruptive to fireflies, she recommended changing out the white for yellow bug lights.

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

Sanfelippo introduced Councilwoman Abbott. Abbott said today was Council meeting day. She said it was a good meeting, only lasting to 10:30 and that there was nothing controversial on the agenda. Abbott said since Highland Park's last meeting the Council has had elections for its officers saying they have a new president, adding the past president became the president pro-tem. She said most have new committee assignments, explaining there are 9 council members but 13 committees. She said the new president rearranged the structure slightly and now each committee member chairs one committee and sits on two committees. Abbott said she asked to remain as chair on Planning & Zoning because she feels our zoning ordinance needs a lot of help. Abbott said one thing was the effort to relax parking requirements for developers, especially for events. She said this effort is an attempt to influence behavior in the reduction of vehicles and more reliance on transit - but that 'transit' isn't there yet. Abbott said she thinks there needs to be some pushback from residents. Abbott said the new parking plan which has passed the planning commission which means it will go to the council next. She said it appears that it will pass - but she has continued to demand resident-only parking zones on the fringes near, for example, UAB, St. Vincents, the new amphitheater/football complex.

Abbott talked about the uniform garbage cart program, that parking issues have affected this effort as well. She said the mayor's office has said they intend to make everyone reasonably happy about the changes before they are finished. She encouraged people with issues to call 311 and tell them you have a topographical or health issue that affects your ability to move the garbage cart on and off the street.

A resident asked about the Southern Area Framework Plan, public meetings, decision on mixed-use and other designations, and whether the city would/could change some of the designations approved by the neighborhood. Abbott said Highland Park approved it, the plan - and asked if the neighborhood had done its zoning yet. She said the long-range usage plan had long-range uses recommended. She said after that phase there is actually the

assignment of zoning and that residents should show up for that meeting. Abbott said she wasn't certain where Highland Park was in the process.

Sanfelippo said she attended one of the stakeholder meeting on 'proposed zoning changes for urban neighborhood designation'. She said the meeting host asked for questions. Sanfelippo said the materials were difficult to read. She said they have asked the group, before the materials are presented to the public, to put together a summary, explain the 'point', why they are trying to do this and some bullet points. She reported talking to Tim Gambro about having their annual community meeting in the first quarter of next year, and having the 'proposed changes' be the focus of it - so they will present the information in layman's terms and people can ask questions. Sanfelippo said neighborhood leadership will keep residents up to date. She said the city's GIS system is helpful and that she will include a link to it in the newsletter. [City of Birmingham GISWEB Version 5.2.2 \(birminghamal.gov\)](#). [Geocortex Viewer for HTML5 \(birminghamal.gov\)](#)

### **Friends of Highland Park Report/Judy Jones**

Judy Jones told residents they might have noticed the three damaged areas in the brick wall across from the golf course had been repaired. She said this happened in a funny way that FOHP had gotten bids for the work from a couple of companies. She said they chose one, contacted the contractor, told him they wanted him to do the work, that FOHP would need to first see about city permission, permits and raise some funds. Jones said a week or so later, at President Anne Sunkel's behest, she contacted the city. She said they were overwhelmingly supportive, Transportation Director James Fowler said he would assign someone to work with FOHP to help navigate permissions and such. She called Anne Sunkel that night to share the good news and Anne reluctantly reported the 'work' had been completed that afternoon, that the wall had been repaired. Jones said the truly funny thing was the next morning, she received an email from Director Fowler saying he had ridden by the wall that morning, and it appeared the wall work had already happened? Residents laughed. Jones said they would begin fundraising for the 'completed project' immediately. Sanfelippo said an address to mail a check and a QR code to get to FOHP's Venmo account had been included in the HPNA newsletter.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Sanfelippo reported that some of the lights in Rhodes Park were still out. Councilwoman Abbott said she understood this was on Alabama Power Company's list to work on. Sanfelippo said she was told to call it into 311, which she said she did some time ago.

Sanfelippo said the neighborhood was still working on a plan to address some of the dilapidated properties in the area.

### **New Business**

A resident asked for an update on the 'EATS' restaurant location, whether someone has bought it. Sanfelippo shared the people who bought what used to be physician's storage building on Highland Avenue in the lot next to 'EATS', that they also purchased the EATS property and the former convenience store at that location as well. She said we do not know what their plans are for this specific parcel but this was the same group who are doing 'George's Restaurant'. She said she has been told they are finishing up the permitting process for George's and expect construction to start any day now.

Sanfelippo recognized Alex Craft. Craft said he and his wife had lived in Highland Park for about seven years, had been home owners now for about 3-1/2 years across from Independent Presbyterian Church. He said he was the incoming HOA president. Craft said he was here tonight to ask about Monterrey Apartments at the corner of Highland and 33<sup>rd</sup>, that their building was right next door. Craft told the group about the many calls to the police for activity that involved residents in the apartment building, a home invasion, frequent noise complaints and fights. Craft said the property was an eyesore at the entrance to the neighborhood. Sanfelippo reporting having a meeting with the woman who is in charge of the property and Devoris Ragland, with the Birmingham Police Department. She said regretfully there are no immediate solutions evident, encouraged Craft to continue contacting the police saying she would follow up with the principals from their meeting to reinvigorate those efforts. Resident Natalie Martina shared recent experiences when calling the police, that she especially didn't feel the police were attentive enough regarding the home invasion into her unit. Sanfelippo said we would definitely follow up with the precinct captain on these issues.

Another resident reported being disappointed with BPD response when she has made noise reports. She said she has called the precinct and talked with perhaps a lieutenant who suggested that when an officer comes out to investigate, to request that they write the offending resident a citation. She said she tried that and the officer refused to write a citation. She wondered if any other residents had experienced this or had advice on how to handle the situations. Councilwoman Abbott said her office was receiving similar complaints from residents in other parts of the district.

Sanfelippo thanked residents for sharing this information at the meeting. She said we will follow up with the BPD precinct and try to get a BPD presence more regularly at our meetings again.

Resident Jim Carnes said regarding the new garbage system and a short-term rental property across the street from his residence where trash was piling up, he had located the landlord's office and spoken to someone and learned they had received no communication, no receptacles, from the city regarding the any changes to garbage pickup. He said he thinks this situation has been rectified but wanted to ask how the city was engaging with short term rental properties. Judy Jones said, we probably need to ask how the city is engaging with any property other than single-family residences. Sanfelippo concurred, that the city's

communication with apartment and condo buildings had been non-existent (as far as she has seen). She said she based that on the number of Highland Park residents who had contacted the neighborhood about issues. Sanfelippo said she felt the neighborhood leadership and Councilwoman Abbott's office had bent over backwards to try and assist the city deal with the fallout from a lack of communication. Sanfelippo said she has also been frustrated by calls made to 311 about trash piling up, and the reports being closed without explanation – or the trash being removed – and Public Works just continues to tell residents to call 311 with their issues. Councilwoman Abbott acknowledged the frustration being experienced and said residents should continue to call 311 and if they have issues, to share them with her office. Sanfelippo said that we have been doing this and Dr Lee had been a huge help. She told the group, report through 311 and email the neighborhood the case number and she will pass the reports along to Councilwoman Abbott's office.

([highlandparkneighborhoodal@gmail.com](mailto:highlandparkneighborhoodal@gmail.com)).

### **Next Meeting**

Sanfelippo told the group we will not have a meeting in December and that our next meeting will be January 9, 2024 at 6 pm, both in-person and virtually. She told everyone to have a safe and happy Thanksgiving.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:31 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judy Jones

Acting Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association