

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

January Minutes

Meeting Date: January 14, 2025

Meeting Location: Highland Park Golf Course, on the second floor

[Link to meeting recording](#)

President Elizabeth Sanfelippo called the January 2025 meeting of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association to order at 6 pm. She welcomed everyone and introduced herself as President, Judy Jones as Vice President and Kelly Marshall as Secretary.

ROLL CALL

Sanfelippo performed a roll call of online attendees as required by the City. Online attendees were: Annette Rodgers, John Lytle Wilson, Anne Sunkel, Erin Kellen, Jim Carnes, Bruno Leardine, Marjorie White, Mark Nelson and Kecia Lightener.

NOVEMBER 2024 MINUTES

Sanfelippo asked if there were any corrections or additions to the November 2024 meeting minutes. John Somerset moved to approve the minutes from the November 2024 meeting. Judy Jones seconded the motion. A vote was taken, no one was opposed, and the minutes were approved. We did not meet in December 2024.

SPEAKER: DAVID SEALE, PRINCIPAL, AVONDALE ELEMENTARY

David Seale has been the principal of Avondale Elementary for five years. He is proud to report that the school has improved by 8 points in the past year. He attributes that success to the teachers and students and he expects the score to improve even more due to an extraordinary third grade class.

Some highlights from the school:

- Avondale had the highest level of reading efficiency in **any** school in the Birmingham City District.
- According to two surveys sent to parents in the fall and spring, 96% of parents feel welcomed in the school and 99% say any time they want to communicate with the teacher, they can and 99% say they feel like the teacher cares about the student. This is a grand improvement from 2019. Avondale is truly a family community school where parents want their children to be.
- In 2019, about 20% of pre-K students would stay at Avondale for kindergarten. In 2024, 28 out of 36 of the pre-K kids stayed at the school for kindergarten.
- The After School Program that Avondale has developed for the students, with the help of parents and the PTA, is truly special. The programs include: dance, chess, theatre, tennis, basketball, boxing, yoga and the programs are available for all students K-5th grade. This has helped attract other local organizations to partner with the school, like Firehouse Community Arts Center, Virginia Samford Theatre, DISCO creative writing, and more. This leads to more choices for students and more enthusiasm for after school programs. The

program has been so wildly successful for the students, it has been nominated for a state-wide award!

- A Highland Park resident won the Spelling Bee today at Avondale Elementary! Lee Wilson came in first place and his little brother Harry came in second place.
- Seale believes there are about 15-20 students from Highland Park at Avondale currently, and the school serves 11 of the 99 neighborhoods.

Judy Jones asked if civics is taught at Avondale Elementary. Seale says it is part of the social studies curriculum, and that they host mock elections in an election year. He added that they are also trying to bring in some special hands-on science opportunities, with Southern Environmental Center, Freshwater Land Trust, Black Warrior Riverkeeper and more. There are several volunteer opportunities and you can learn more at <https://www.bhamcityschools.org/o/aves>

REZONING MEETING

Morris Newman announced that there will be another meeting hosted by Planning, Engineering, and Permits (PEP) staff for the Red Mountain Community, Crestline Community and Crestwood Community to vote on the proposed new zoning from the City. He wants to stress that it will be very important to attend this meeting where we will vote on the Rezoning Plan for District 3. The Zoning Committee has significant concern about Mixed Use Medium in Highland Park and will be speaking to the PEP about it before the meeting where we vote, so please plan to attend that meeting when it is scheduled.

ZONING CASE FOR 2620 11TH AVENUE SOUTH

[Click here](#) to see the renderings discussed.

This is Greg Lee's property. The Zoning Committee recommends this variance to allow adjustment to add a parking spot on their front "yard". While this is not typically allowed, the committee supports allowing a variance to allow a parking pad in the that is slightly in front of the house in the front yard instead of the side or rear yard because:

- There is no physical way for a driveway to extend past the house.
- There is current competition with on-street parking because of Virginia Samford Theatre, and the upcoming George's Restaurant.

The property owner, Greg Lee, also shares that the new design will feature less concrete, and will enhance the look of the front yard. Anne Sunkel lives on the street and wants to commend the proposed improvements on the home. She also wanted to stress the parking demand that is on their street and extends her full support to this neighbor.

The Committee recommends approval of the variance in this case only to allow a parking pad, contingent upon the project fully complying with the site plan at 2620 11th Avenue South.

The motion was approved by a vote of 15 in favor, none opposed, and one abstained.

UPDATE FROM COUNCILOR ABBOTT

There was a lot of discussion at today's City Council meeting about the street closings in East Lake, the Mayor's test case for closing entrance/exit streets in high-crime areas. Crime dropped during this testing phase. In addition to testing the street closures, they also cleaned up burned down / blight houses, cleaned up trash, fixed potholes, added traffic calming on some of the streets, etc. The City Council decided to continue the program with some tweaks based on community feedback.

The Mayor gave his State of the City speech today during the Council meeting, so the Council adjourned, listened to the speech, then came back and finished their meeting. During the State of the City, the Mayor addressed the Crime Commission Report which addressed what should be done about the crime issues in Birmingham - most specifically the gun murders. The report is on the website [\(here\)](#). Some solutions include training for jobs and more.

Judy Jones said she read the Crime Commission Report and noticed there is a lot of focus on the number of homicides but she doesn't ever see stats on other types of gun violence.

Councilor Abbott also wanted to stress the importance of attending and voting at the upcoming Zoning Meeting that is planned for the very near future. She also stressed submitting all of the changes we want to see ahead of the meeting as there is **no** opportunity for change after a vote is taken. As a reminder: zoning is forever. There will be a couple of chances for anyone with opposition to speak at the ZAC (Zoning Advisory Committee) meeting that will be held prior to the proposal going to the council for finalization. Residents can sign up to speak at that council meeting too.

A resident heard a rumor that the City is disbanding the Neighborhood Association system. Councilor Abbott says she has not heard that, but she does believe the system will be changing due to a lawsuit from a Glen Iris resident. Abbott says she would be very against disbanding the system because of well run groups like Highland Park's. She said Highland Park has consistently been well attended and full of interested and caring people :) She says this system is the only way for residents to have a voice in the city.

Someone asked Councilor Abbott if she is running for re-election and sadly, she is not. She will be out of office in October 2025, after 24 years in service. She says Josh Vasa, a very fine young man, is running and is awesome.

OFFICER PATTON FROM THE SOUTH PRECINCT

Officer Patton patrols Titusville in the daytime. He is here to listen to concerns and take them back to the police department. A resident saw on Nextdoor that there was a picture of someone with a gun who may have stolen a car on 28th St. Another resident who lives on Milner Crescent said that around 1:45 am, a crew of people came down Milner Crescent. One guy on foot, checking each car door, with a UHaul van behind him. The resident assumes the van is there to put any stolen goods in. He has video of this and shared it with the police officer. The resident says a car was stolen off his street on January 2. He told an officer about this but hasn't heard any update.

The officer said there is a form where you can link your Ring (or other security) cameras with the police's camera system and have access to videos and footage of neighbors.. The form is at the Birmingham library.

Judy Jones requested if the officers could provide crime stats with us at each neighborhood meeting. The officer will pass that along to the department. Officer Patton mentioned the Neighborhood Watch program and said we could revamp that program if we wanted. Officer Patton reminded people to not leave valuables in your cars. A resident asked about the status of exhibition driving and Officer Patton thinks the cold weather has stopped them ... for now!

OLD BUSINESS

- There is a pending sale on the Little Villa!!! Sanfelippo met the new owner and he has plans to renovate the home for his daughter! Sanfelippo immensely thanks everyone who signed the petition, donated money to Friends of Highland Park to get the additional engineering study completed, and supported the effort. This is a HUGE win for Highland Park, yay! We saved a little jewel in our neighborhood!
- Agenda items for these meetings need to be sent to Sanfelippo at least two weeks ahead of the meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- Sanfelippo was approached by an individual who wants to help redo the basketball court in Rushton Park. She will follow-up on that.
- Thank you to Friends of Highland Park for taking over the costs of the Mailchimp account!
- There is now a city Homeless Outreach Number (1-659-596-3458) if you know someone who is unhoused, or if you need help with an unhoused person.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- January 22 at 3:30 in City Council Chambers – more discussion of the Short Term Rentals issue. This is not a public hearing, but it is open to the public. Councilor Abbott was surprised when Councilors O'Quinn and Smitherman said they WANT them in residential districts. Abbott was the only one against them. Abbott is working with an heir property expert who has created a map highlighting all of the short-term rentals in the Birmingham area. There are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of them - all over our City and the concentration are in District 5 and 3. It is important to speak out with your opinion about them! We have a declining population in Birmingham – and a lot of that is due to properties owned by out-of-town investors. The next public hearing for this will be in front of the City Council, and will be the one that influences the vote. This date has not been set but Councilor Abbott will let us know when that is.
- Garden spots are now open until March! [Click here to apply](#) for a garden spot in the 2025 growing season.
- CityWalkBham.com is where you can find info about City Walk Mardi Gras happening on January 24.

- Large Trash and brush is every other week. Next one is Thursday, January 16 and the one after is January 30. See links in the newsletter for full dates. Recycling is every other Monday, but we don't know about Holiday makeup dates yet.
- Citizen Police Academy - call 933-4175 for info. Training is ten weeks from February 4 - April 22. Tuesday nights 6-8 and one Saturday 9-12 where you go out in a police car!
- Alabama Audubon Bird of the Year fundraising event is February 1. More info: www.alaudubon.com
- Next meeting: Tuesday, February 11 at 6 pm. *The Zoning Committee meeting was going to be held at 5:30 pm before the regular meeting, but that has since been postponed to a date yet to be determined.*
- Reminder: there is a resident who is interested in a dog park in one of the parks. She has created a survey ([here](#)) and is currently gathering feedback. She will speak at our next meeting. **Update post meeting:** *This effort has been abandoned, but if anyone is interested in taking it on, please email the neighborhood association by replying to a newsletter email and we will connect you with resources.*

MORE ABOUT THE REZONING

Sanfelippo reported that our Zoning Committee meticulously went through the proposed zoning map of Highland Park and looked at each property and presented suggested markups and lists for the City to change on their maps. Morris Newman says the main concern is the Mixed Use Medium (MUM) category. The City is proposing MUM on Highland Avenue properties that are currently zoned for single-family. The Zoning Committee's goal is to protect the architectural integrity of our beautiful neighborhood and therefore the current position of the Zoning Committee is to protect every single structure in this neighborhood that is currently residential should remain that way, and every single family home should remain that way. Newman provided some specific examples of this. This is what will be presented to the PEP before the next Red Mountain Community Meeting where we will vote on the proposed zoning.

Sanfelippo said, in closing, that the CPP is the Citizens Participation Plan and is a legal document, and is law. It outlines the structure for the 99 Neighborhood Associations and the grouping of those into 23 communities. The Community Advisory Board is made up of the leaders of 23 Communities. They meet once a month and are tasked with reviewing the CP Plan every two years. They submitted some basic edits to the plan two years ago, and the city's legal department has still not gotten back to them about it. Based on this, Sanfelippo does not anticipate a major overhaul of the Neighborhood Association system anytime in the near future.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:26ish pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
 Kelly Marshall
 Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association