

Highland Park Neighborhood Association

April Minutes

Meeting Date: April 8, 2025

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

[Link to meeting recording](#)

Vice President Judy Jones called the April 2025 meeting of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association to order at 6 pm. She explained both President Elizabeth Sanfelippo and Secretary Kelly Marshall were away with conflicts tonight (although Kelly Marshall was online supporting the meeting, so may be checking in from time to time). She welcomed everyone to the meeting.

ROLL CALL

Jones performed a roll call of online attendees as required by the City. Online attendees were: Connie Urist, Justin McCleskey, Katie D, Kecia Lightener, John Davis and Marjorie White.

MARCH 2025 MINUTES

Jones asked if there were any corrections or additions to the February 2025 meeting minutes. Being none, she asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Marian Wilson moved to approve the minutes from the February 2025 meeting. Melanie Jackson seconded the motion. Jones called the vote. The motion passed unanimously with no abstentions.

FUNDING FOR MULCH/TRASH CANS IN RUSHTON PARK

Jones said there was a proposal to spend 1) \$2500 on mulch for the playground areas in Rushton Park and 2) \$3100 for two trash cans to replace barrels near Rushton Park gardens. Jones said this expenditure request totaled \$5600. Marian Wilson moved to approve the spending \$5600 request. Crawford Miller seconded the motion. Jones asked for any discussion. Being none, she called for a vote. The motion passed with a vote of 13 for the motion, 0 against and 0 abstentions.

NEW HIGHLAND PARK TREE PROGRAM

Jones asked Ray Davis if he would share about a new tree program that is about to benefit Highland Park. Davis shared that the Botanical Gardens, Brasfield & Gorrie and Blackjack Horticulture had pulled Highland Park into a tree opportunity, adding that we have just received 20 white oak trees, 3 gallon container size. He said we would receive another 25 in the fall, all of this at no cost to the neighborhood. Davis said we will need to pick them up and plant them. Jones shared the initial 25 had been picked up. Davis said all indications are that we will be able to receive more of these trees in the future. He said the neighborhood has had a number of great tree initiatives over the past several years. Davis said the neighborhood has put in roughly \$15-20,000 over the past few years for trees. He said there was a planting project initiated by Mark Wilson to plant 75 trees in Caldwell and Rhodes Parks.

VIRGINIA SAMFORD THEATRE SEASON

Jones told the group that Philip Mann, the Executive Director of Virginia Samford Theatre, was supposed to be the speaker tonight, but that she understood VST had a fire inspection this

afternoon and there was something that required repair and he had to stay there tonight and supervise that work. Jones talked about the special nature of the space, that they have been there for 98 years (adding sounds like a centennial celebration may be in the works) and they do wonderful work. She went through a few of the upcoming shows - 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf!' that is currently running on the mainstage through April 13. Jones shared the next main stage show is "Big River: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn", opening July 17 and running through August 3. Jones said they would include a to VST's season either with the minutes or on the HPNA website.

UPDATE FROM COUNCILOR VALERIE ABBOTT

Abbott asked if there were any burning issues that Highland Park residents wanted to ask about. She spoke about the rezoning related to the Southern Framework Plan. Abbott said all of it is getting ready to go to the Planning Commission and everyone will have another opportunity to speak at a public hearing about the rezoning. Abbott referenced the vote held at the Botanical Gardens, where some 110 people opposed the plan, maybe 10 people supported it and there was one abstention. Abbott said for some reason the planners have decided not to come back and work with the neighborhoods. Abbott said she applauds Highland Park for being so vocal in communicating their priorities and desire not to over-densify.

A question was asked about the Ramsay McCormick building in Ensley. Abbott provided a little history of the project. She said the city was more or less stuck with it because of the legalities involved. She said they have now made this commitment to build a five story building. She said the judge has not dismissed them from the case. She added they are hopeful they do not get stuck with legal fees from the case.

MISCELLANEOUS

A question was asked about the new restaurant Georges, whether the fireplace would have a negative effect on the trees there. Jones said she did not know but they would find out.

A question was asked about the derelict houses on Rhodes Circle. Jones said she felt like there was more movement now than there has been.

A question was asked about the Villa. Jones reported the property has been sold and was currently under renovations to be returned to single family status for the owner's daughter to live there. Jones said this whole effort represented a huge success for Highland Park preservation efforts.

A question was asked about the triangle park near Hanover. Jones said the lack of landscape work during the winter months was intentional. She said a work day was scheduled a while back. She said Friends of Highland Park had approached residents nearby about raising funds to improve the park, some folks were supportive but some were not. She suggested emailing President Sanfelippo about their concerns rather than contacting the city. Valerie Abbott said there are funds available for park repairs and that her office had asked for an accounting of that money. Jones said she knew there were repairs needed, that just tonight someone had mentioned to her that a gate into one of the playground areas was broken. She said they will follow-up with Valerie's

office to find out how to get Highland Park 'park' repairs on the list. Rushton Park gate issues on both fenced areas have been previously reported to Councilor Abbott's office, and Sanfelippo will send again.

FRIENDS OF HIGHLAND PARK UPDATE

Jones reported that Friends of Highland Park (FOHP) had sent out a nice donor update and that this piece had been linked in the last HPNA Newsletter.

Jones referenced the handout that people had been given as they arrived tonight. She began by sharing there had recently been several 'tree' incidents in Highland Park. The first incident involved misinformation about the trees in front of Rojo. She said this incident turned into an online petition and people calling Rojo saying they wouldn't eat there again if the trees came down. Jones said she was so concerned about the contentiousness around this incident that she began researching neighborhood tree plans/policies. She said she was working one morning on this research and received a call from Elizabeth about an incident occurring on 29th between a resident and someone wanting to cut a tree down in the city right of way. The situation was averted but not without a contentious and stressful interaction with contractors that included police intervention. In truth, **no one can take down a tree within the city right of way, except the city.** Jones added, but not everyone knows and understands that. She said in the next meeting of Friends of Highland Park, she relayed these incidents and submitted a proposal that FOHP lead an effort to craft a tree policy for the neighborhood. The group was receptive to this. Fast forward a few weeks and now Alabama Power Company (APC) is knocking on doors, announcing plans to trim/cut trees in a way that is much more aggressive than in previous years. Jones said residents are justifiably upset. She said she had an idea based on an experience she had with Alabama Power Company some 20 years ago (she told APC they could cut her tree if they would send someone who knew what kind of tree it was - and they did), that related to handling different tree types in different ways. Jones said she knew APC didn't have the time or resources to differentiate between tree types in their trimming (although they should since they are supposed to have an arborist present during cutting) but what if the neighborhood supplied the information to be able to easily do that, identify the fast versus slow growing trees. She said, what if the neighborhood inventoried all the trees in the neighborhood in public space and whether they were slow or fast growing varieties and then labeled the trees as such so APC could differentiate in their trimming. She said this may be better for APC from an economic and time perspective. Jones said she had been trying to find someone at APC to listen to this idea with no success. FOHP is interested in, first, crafting a proposal to do this that can be shared with APC and second, coordinating a group of volunteers to perform the inventory and along the way, work on a tree policy for the neighborhood. She referred residents back to the handout. She said she thought it would be helpful if the neighborhood passed this resolution:

Be it resolved Be it Resolved:

Highland Park Neighborhood Association supports of Friends of Highland Park in its efforts to

1. Work with area stakeholders to create a draft for a 'Highland Park Tree Plan' and present it at a neighborhood meeting when available

2. Recruit volunteers and work on a tree inventory plan to document, at a minimum, the type, condition, and location of trees on public property and in the public right of way
3. Work with Alabama Power Company, to the extent possible, to reduce loss of neighborhood tree canopy during the upcoming right-of-way tree trimming

The neighborhood requests that Friends of Highland Park:

1. Keep President Elizabeth Sanfelippo apprised of its progress in these efforts
2. Present FOHP's draft plan to the neighborhood when available

Jones said the inventory, going forward, could potentially help Highland Park manage its tree canopy in a more assertive way in the future. She said we could be more proactive in identifying trees that should come down, in planting trees, in educating residents on caring for trees on their property. Jones said she has presented this idea to individuals at Audubon, the Birmingham Historical Society, Cool Green Trees, the Birmingham Botanical Society and the city Horticulture Department - and all said this overall effort, starting with a tree inventory, was a great idea.

Valerie Abbott told residents the city has a tree ordinance but it is pitiful and doesn't really do much. She added that the city used to have a tree commission but it more or less imploded. She said they have been working on a new tree ordinance. Abbott said they have promised her that before she leaves office, the city will get a new tree ordinance passed. She said she will get a copy of the most recent iteration of the policy and send it to Jones and Elizabeth Sanfelippo, so that the neighborhood can see what is missing and what needs to be in there. She said the Birmingham police do not know much about trees and that it is illegal to cut trees in public space or right of way. She said APC has always been very involved with the tree commission and they keep a list of recommended trees for planting near power lines. Abbott said the good thing is that the new ordinance does have some teeth in it, some enforcement for illegal tree cutting and some fixes for some of the problems experienced by neighborhoods with a wealth of tree canopy they want to preserve, like Highland Park, Five Points South, Glen Iris, etc.

Jones asked for any discussion regarding the proposed resolution. Marian Wilson asked about the scope of the inventory. Jones said she felt initially the inventory would involve trees in the public right of way, likely put priority on trees in the proximity of power lines but also ultimately, extend to the trees in Highland Park parks but, at least initially, would not extend to the trees on private property. Jones said she feels this project would represent a nice photo-op for APC without them having to give up too much. Jones said she thought she had found the name of the correct person to get this proposal in front of. A resident said APC has started cutting in her alley. Jones said she would escalate her efforts to find someone at APC.

Jones asked if there was a motion on this proposal. Melanie Jackson moved to approve the proposal as written. Marian Wilson seconded the proposal. Jones asked for discussion. Being none, she called for a vote. The motion passed with 14 votes for the motion, 0 against and 0 abstentions.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Jones reminded residents recycling was now every other Monday on garbage pick up day

(not the 1st and 3rd Wednesday)

- Large Trash and Brush will be April 10th and 25th.

Jones advised residents that the Secretary of State office had sent out letters to 400,000 state residents. The letter stated that the state has reason to believe the voter may have moved out of state and should no longer be on the Alabama voter roll. They ask the voter, if this is not true, to complete the enclosed card within the next X days and return it to their county probate office. Jones said if residents happen to receive one of these letters to pay attention to it and follow the instructions.

Jones said a police officer was now present at the meeting. She asked him to come up and provide an update. The officer introduced himself, saying he worked out of the Southside Precinct. He told the group the precinct has stepped up efforts to deal with illegal parking in the neighborhood. He recommended calling 911 to report illegal parking instead of the non-emergency number, adding it would be processed more quickly. He said he didn't have stats tonight but he committed to bringing them next time. Jones asked about the handicapped parking at the golf course right now, that when she came in, there were 2 cars in the places without handicapped placards. The officer said he would check it out when he left the meeting. A resident asked about speeders on 28th Street. The officer said they would step up surveillance.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:10 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judy Jones

Vice President, Highland Park Neighborhood Association