

# Highland Park Neighborhood Association

## May Minutes

Meeting Date: May 12, 2026 Meeting Location: Rojo

[Link to meeting recording](#)

Vice-President Judy Jones called the May 2026 meeting of the Highland Park Neighborhood Association to order at 6 pm. She welcomed everyone and introduced herself as vice-president and Kelly Marshall as secretary. Elizabeth Sanfelippo, president of HPNA, is out of town.

### **APRIL MINUTES**

Jones asked if there were any corrections or additions to the April meeting minutes. Morris Newman moved to approve the April minutes and Philip Foster seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all approved, no one was opposed, and the minutes were approved.

### **ROLL CALL**

Those attending online are: Lt. Jamarcus Brown (Birmingham Fire and Rescue), Marjorie White, Anne Sunkel, Margaret Grubb, Adam and Priscilla LeBerte, Joe Wilson, Annette Rodgers, Connie Urist, Kimberly Spearl (City of Birmingham ("COB")), Dennis Scully, Michael Ward (COB), Justin McCleskey (COB and HP resident), Jesslyn Mays (COB)

### **UPDATES FROM THE FIRE DEPARTMENT**

Lt. Jamarcus Brown provided some updates from the fire department including:

- Be sure to check the expired date on your smoke detector, and change them every 10 years.
- Check the batteries on your smoke detector.
- Carbon monoxide detectors should be changed every 5-7 years.

### **SOUTHERN AREA FRAMEWORK DISCUSSION**

Morris Newman addressed the audience once again to discuss the City's proposed Southern Area Framework Discussion. [Click here](#) to see materials shared online and in person during this discussion.

NOTE: This was a lengthy discussion in person and online for this issue. If you want to hear the entire discussion, all questions asked and answered, [click here](#) and listen from 00:12:00 - 01:51:28. More information, including maps (not currently updated by the city) can also be found [here](#).

As a reminder, the Highland Park Neighborhood Association's Zoning Committee has been meeting regularly for two years to address the City's proposed rezoning plan. Our neighborhood is the very last neighborhood to vote for the plan, and the City is ready to get our approval ASAP in order to move forward with the City's comprehensive plans. The HPNA Zoning Committee's opinion was presented as:

*Over the past two years, your Committee has been working to ensure that the City's proposed Southern Framework Zoning Plan protects and preserves the historic architecture of Highland Park. This is critical because the Framework plan will set the zoning of all the property in our neighborhood for decades to come.*

*To its credit, the City's zoning department, the Department of Planning, Engineering and Permits, (PEP), has worked collaboratively with us to try to improve the plan.*

*However, PEP's intent is to now move their current plan towards City Council approval later this month. The current plan leaves many of our neighborhood's historic properties vulnerable to loss.*

*If we don't protect the historic homes of Highland Park through proper zoning, inevitably, many will suffer the same fate as those lost in past decades. The time to do this is now, right now.*

The Zoning Committee (ZC) has identified quite a few single family homes that are in an area where the city is asserting it should be zoned multi-family. Some examples of these are along Rhodes Circle, 30th Street, the Little Villa, etc. The Zoning Committee is ready to present a resolution today for the neighborhood to consider adopting to present to the City. Yesterday, the ZC presented this potential plan to the City in advance, and the ZC learned the City was not interested in this proposed plan.

Jim Cooper, co-chair of the ZC, reminded the audience that currently, if your neighbor has a single family home, they can apply for a demolition permit if they want. Even if denied at that time, they can go back in exactly one year and ask for a demolition permit, in which case they are most likely approved. Cooper says the ZC is concerned about that happening with the Little Villa and other properties in the neighborhood, and making sure that the zoning is in place and correct before something like that happens is another important part of this discussion at this time.

Most of the homes that the ZC is trying to defend at this time are currently zoned D5, which is multi-family, not single family, and means if anything happens to the properties that are currently single family, such as a fire, or more, apartment buildings can be built instead of restoring a historic property. The audience viewed a slideshow of locations that would be affected in the Southern Area Framework Plan. Many of these homes have been single family homes for 100+ years, but are zoned multi-family.

There were some questions that related to WHY some of the codes are as they are (like the one year moratorium on demolition) and about historic preservation. Kim Spearl (City of Birmingham) reminded us that Hannah Garmon is our Historic Preservation Manager. Her Division regulates the portion of the City Code that was referenced, not zoning. [SPECIAL NOTE: there was some horrendous technical difficulties with laptops and microphones and a horrible echo, so Spearl is answering via chat and working on calling in to answer further questions below]

A resident asked if a single family home has a carriage home in the back, is that considered single family or multi family? Spearl said carriage houses or accessory dwelling units are not allowed in single family zoning districts.

Newman ran through a few other examples of zoning non conforming examples in the neighborhood such as Clubhouse on Highland and a few others. Basically, if a property is currently allowed to operate as a multi family or other now, and they are rezoned to single family in the new Southern Area Framework Plan, they will still be allowed to operate as they currently area, as a legal nonconforming example, basically they would be grandfathered in.

Mary Helen Crow asked, “so basically, we are trying to get these homes zoned D3 and the city is not allowing that?” Morris agreed and Crow asked why? Morris explained that the City is trying to avoid having multiple mixed various zonings in the same street. The City wants the single family homes rezoned to multi family homes. The ZC does not want that.

Philip Foster asked if a property was previously zoned multifamily D4, but has now been turned back into single family by use, can they ask to be voluntarily changed to D3? His question continued... or does the city want to instead change everything on that same street to D4 so that the street is uniform in the zoning? Newman believes the answer is closer to the second (the city wants the street zoned the same) and the ZC is in opposition to that.

Speorl (Birmingham City) called in with answers! (See at the 35 minute mark in the video linked above) First, she wanted to remind everyone of the City’s goal for the Framework Plan throughout every community in the city is to change the names from R to D, and NOT the classification unless that classification ceases to exist in the new ordinance. Another change is to introduce mixed use districts to all areas where they could apply, across the city. The City is trying to introduce Mixed Use Low, Mixed Use Medium and Mixed Use High to Highland Park.

In 2024, when the plan was first presented, there was a rezoning plan for around **610-620** parcels in Highland Park. Speorl says that since that was first presented, her team has met with HPNA, leaders and others 11 times, and as of today the City has changed **588** of those 610 parcels to a different zoning based on OUR feedback. It is important for us to remember that the City has been listening and making changes based on our recommendations.

Now, there are **20ish** properties remaining that have not been changed yet. As another reminder, she stated if your property is currently R3, you are going to D3, R4 to D4 and R5 to D5. If you are R6, R7 or R8, you will be down zoned to either D3, D4 or D5.

The City has looked at a list of final remaining properties that the ZC has sent them and about half of those properties or more, if they were downzoned to single family, they would be legal nonconforming, as Newman mentioned earlier. Speorl said that [legal nonconforming](#) is very complicated legally and in zoning issues. It COULD mean if there was a small commercial office inside one of the properties that was downzoned because it “looks like” a single family home, it could impact their insurance, their mortgage, their financials, etc. It would also be considered a “taking” by the city, which is also illegal. Speorl said their goal is to avoid creating legal nonconforming properties as much as possible because of these issues.

Speorl said another goal of theirs through this process is to avoid creating “zoning islands”. If an entire blockface is zoned R4, and is changing to D4, but there is a request for one house on the entire block be downsized to D3, that is not good zoning practice, according to Speorl. She recognized that Highland Park is unique in that we do have multiple zonings in one block but they are either D4 or D5.

In D4 and D5 districts, single family residential is allowed, with a height maximum of 35 feet, so Highland Park’s D4 and D5 districts would be preserved. Density in D4 and D5 is also tied to lot size. Speorl says the City understands the neighborhood’s desire to preserve the historic homes. Because of this, her team has

worked with Hannah Garmon and her team at the Historic Preservation department, and believes the existing tools like the guidelines, form based overlay for Highland Park only, and the character standards available to any property zoned for mixed use provides sufficient protection for the historic properties.

Jim Cooper asked to clarify: the current 35' maximum height restriction on D4 and D5 is now 35 instead of 65' like it was in the first plan because of the neighborhood's pressure? Speorl says that is because of former City Councilor Valerie Abbott's advocacy! Abbott worked with Speorl's team to change that before these plans were presented to the City Council.

Pat Byington's home is one of the homes up for rezoning. He spoke about his home and the zoning changes it has seen over the past 60-70 years. He wants his house to remain single family zoning.

Newman asked if anyone else in the room has a home that would be impacted by the rezoning? Marian Wilson said her home was one of the homes pictured in the slideshow and she wants her home to remain single family zoning as well.

There were some more questions about specific properties. Newman is encouraging the neighborhood to use this opportunity to correct some past wrongs in zoning at this time, before it is too late. Mary Helen Crowe asked if any of this discussion impacts the one year moratorium on demolition permits we discussed earlier? Newman says not directly, but the point is: if your neighbor decides to demolish his/her single family home, but your street has been rezoned as D4 or D5 instead of D3, s/he can demolish the home (after the one year wait from first application), and then build a multi family apartment complex next door to you.

The process for the Southern Area Zoning Framework is:

Planning Commission → subcommittee of City Council → City Council.

D3 Councilor Josh Vasa is the co-chair of the subcommittee that will be hearing this.

The Zoning Committee prepared a proposed resolution for the neighborhood to consider. The proposed resolution is as follows:

### HPNA Zoning Committee Proposed Resolution Regarding the Southern Zoning Framework Plan

1. The neighborhood's current position, that owners of historically single – family homes, currently being used for other purposes, will be asked to consider voluntary downzoning to D3, is contingently withdrawn. This withdrawal is contingent upon the City agreeing with the other provisions of this resolution.
2. We agree, and thank the department, for the 4 properties shown as "*Recommended Map Changes*" and 3206 Cliff Road, that you agree should be D3.
3. The neighborhood - ***in the strongest possible manner*** – is of the firm belief that 1332 and 1336 34<sup>th</sup> Street, 1411 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, and all the properties in the *Additional Properties Reviewed by Staff* section, ***must*** be zoned D3. Failure to zone these properties D3 represents a clear and present existential threat to the continued viability of the historic nature of our neighborhood.
4. 1025 & 1105 30<sup>th</sup> Street, single-family homes that retain their character as single family but are being operated as multi-family, should be zoned D3.

Because the resolution above was presented from the Zoning Committee, a motion is not needed, but discussion is allowed. Many residents expressed confusion and wanted more information. Haydeh Payami requested a list of each property the ZC is concerned about, what it is currently zoned as, what the City is proposing it to be rezoned as, what sort of shape it is in, and what the current property is being used as (single family? Home office? Multi family? etc.)

Newman agrees and would be happy to gather that information, but reminded the neighborhood that we have to have our opinion set before the next City Council meeting which will be hearing this, on June 9. The ZC did not receive the City's position on these properties until a few days ago. Newman asked Spearl if the City could be willing to wait until we could gather all of this information and the neighborhood could vote on those specific properties with that specific information.

Spearl said there are a lot of city deadlines that must be kept along the way including advertising of the next public hearing, and it is preferred that the neighborhood vote happen before the next Planning and Zoning Committee meeting on June 9. Spearl reminded us that Highland Park is the last neighborhood, of all the neighborhoods, to give their recommendation.

There was much *more* discussion about deadlines and when meetings can or cannot happen. Mary Helen Crowe asked if we could hold a special Highland Park Neighborhood Association meeting before June 9?

The Zoning Committee agrees to look into each of these properties which are currently zoned R4, proposed to change to D4, but are mostly single family homes:

*3515 Cliff Road note: this property was mistakenly listed*

3319 Cliff Road

2931 Highland Avenue

1051 and 1063 24th Street South

3328 Cliff Road

2617 11th Avenue South

2817, 2839 and 2843 11th Avenue South

1108 29th Street South

2834 Highland Avenue

2801, 2974, 2956 and 2944 Rhodes Circle

1117, 1115, 1109, 1103, 1021, 1015, 1007, 1003 and 815 30th Street South

Philip Foster asked if a current single home is currently zoned R4 (to be changed to D4), could that property owner ask the city to be downsized to D3, single family? Spearl says yes they could. Newman said that would be considered spot zoning and there is no guarantee it would be approved?

Finally, after much discussion, Morris Newman recommends that we continue the motion that was on the floor (which was accepting the resolution above), and review again when more information is gathered. There was more discussion of other ways to handle the current motion.

The Zoning Committee finally decided to withdraw the motion with the understanding the subject matter will be addressed in a special called meeting sometime before June 9. The ZC will gather supplemental information before then and present to the neighborhood before the special called meeting.

### **CITY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION GRANT**

Jones said that have been asked to support the City DOT with a grant to modernize traffic signals in Highland Park. Philip Foster moved to support this grant however needed. Mary Helen Crowe seconded. There were approximately 20 approved, no objections and one abstained.

### **UPDATES FROM COUNCILOR JOSH VASA**

Councilor Vasa started off with a huge spotlight on the fact that 588 of the properties in Highland Park were redressed / rezoned after conversations with HP Zoning Committee and Kim Spearl and her department at PEP! That's awesome! He also reminded us that we are the ONE neighborhood remaining of the 99 neighborhoods, but we are in the home stretch.

June 9 is when the Southern Area Framework will be presented to the City Council. Council will then vote to recommend or not recommend. Conversations can continue after June 9 as well. Feedback is important!

Reminder of Folk Fest happening May 16. [Read more about it here.](#)

New District 3 website is coming soon, stay tuned! Also, new email address for you to get in touch: [district3@birminghamal.gov](mailto:district3@birminghamal.gov)

**Don't forget to vote on Tuesday, May 19!** The meeting was adjourned at around 8:10 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kelly Marshall  
Secretary, Highland Park Neighborhood Association