

## MINUTES

### Virginia-Highland Civic Association Board Meeting

December 14, 2011; the Church of Our Saviour

Mr. White called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Present were board members Frazier Dworet, Genny Ferrero, Lauren Wilkes Fralick, Nicole Forschler-Horn, Brian Gross, Pamela Papner, Jack White, & John Wolfinger. David Wolfson was late with notice and arrived subsequently. Lola Carlisle was absent with notice. Peggy Berg and Rob Glancy arrived subsequently.

The attached agenda (labeled "Addendum 1") was approved without objection. Mr. White noted that most of the meeting will be spent in a review and discussion of the potential impacts and possible responses to the Atlanta Public School (hereafter, "APS") system's recently announced initial four options for re-districting, all of which impact VaHi, Morningside, and our adjacent neighborhoods.

Mr. White thanked Father John Bolton of The Church of Our Saviour for making the space available to the association on very short notice. Father Bolton welcomed everyone, observed that the issue of quality community-based schools was important to everyone in the neighborhood, and wished everyone well.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

There was no old business.

### **POLICE AND FIRE**

Officer Stenningberg of the APD reported that crime was down from last year but that residents should be cautious during the holiday season.

### **CITY AND ELECTED OFFICIALS**

There were no city or elected officials present.

### **PLANNING**

Variance V 11-163; 1036 Drewry St. NE

Mr. White reported that because the applicant was a neighbor of his, he had not been part of the Planning Committee's discussions on this matter.

Applicant James Russell sought a variance to reduce the rear yard setback from 15' to 5' to allow for the addition of an accessory structure. After Mr. Russell's presentation, Mark Arnold of the Planning Committee reported that the applicant's failure to produce either a survey or carefully-drawn plat left the committee unable to determine the exact boundaries of the plat. Mr. Arnold also noted that the application was incompletely filled out; no impervious surface figures were provided on the application and those offered by Mr. Russell did not conform to observations made on the visit. The Planning

Committee recommended denial. After an additional round of comments from the audience and observations by Mr. Russell, Ms. Forchler-Horn made and Mr. Dworet seconded a motion to approve the Planning Committee's recommendation of denial. The motion was approved 3-2; Mr. Dworet, Ms. Ferrero, and Ms. Forschler-Horn voted in favor; Mr. Glancy and Mr. Wolfinger voted against. All other members abstained.

## **BUDGET COMMITTEE**

Mr. Dworet moved and Ms. Papner seconded a motion authorizing the expenditure of \$3500 to pay for an A-133 audit requested by the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority for VHCA's FY 20008, in relation to a loan funding the purchase of New Highland Park. Mr. Dworet reported the request is a standard one but has pending for some time and needs to be addressed. The motion passed unanimously.

## **APS REDISTRICTING**

Mr. White observed that the blunt methodology and rushed process used by the school board in presenting their proposals have produced levels of disappointment, distress and anger reminiscent of those occasioned by the Ga. Highway Department's attempt to ram the infamous I-485 through the neighborhood 40 years ago. He noted that a key element of that struggle was the ability of all the impacted communities to work together. He reported that VHCA expected to comment directly to the school board about the first round of APS proposals and has also begun discussions with concerned adjacent neighborhood associations, with the goal of advocating for an orderly and thoughtful process that was proportional to the degree of changes being proposed.

Mr. White turned the floor over to Ms. Forschler-Horn.

Ms. Forschler-Horn began with a prepared presentation on the existing proposals, including their abrupt arrival, the surprise among this and adjacent neighborhoods at their content, the 'informational' meeting that featured APS' contracted demographers at Parkside Elementary, and the subsequent and varied responses by other neighborhoods. (This slideshow – in PowerPoint - is attached as "Addendum B".)

She then chaired an intense and wide-ranging but focused discussion on reactions and potential responses, throughout which she and the audience identified what they labeled 'core principles' that might animate VHCA's initial response. Many audience members refined and remarked on them as they took shape.

This discussion consumed well over an hour and a half and was animated, thoughtful, and positive, given the extreme disappointment that many citizens voiced with the process. As it neared a conclusion, Ms. Forschler-Horn summed up the themes as she had heard them and asked for further comment on them. She proposed that they serve as the core of a proposed VHCA letter to the school board. Concisely, they are: VHCA rejects all of the options being proposed, as they require neighborhoods to assert only their own interests at the cost of their neighbors. If difficult choices are to be made, then using thoughtful, inclusive, deliberative, and transparent processes is paramount. The data that supports such decisions must be readily available. Every attempt must be made to honor and respect communities and promote walkable neighborhood schools. The need for added capacity at

Springdale Park and Mary Lin is obvious, and work to that end should begin ASAP. If there are students improperly attending now over-crowded schools, they should be identified.

Ms. Forschler-Horn will draft a letter for the VHCA board expressing these principles, and the board will consider acting upon it immediately. Any action it takes will be posted on its web site. Mr. White indicated that the VHCA board would work with adjacent communities as much as possible to ask that the speed of this process be reduced and that a thoughtful and fair approach be employed.

As of the moment of the adoption of these minutes, the entire meeting may be viewed on two websites: (1) <http://vahi.patch.com/articles/virginia-highland-residents-plan-fight-against-school-redistricting>; (2) <http://virginiahighlandconnect.org/>

The meeting adjourned at 9:14.