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## March 2012

### New Voice, new website!

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by *Brian Gross, Communications chair*



Welcome to the new monthly **online edition of the Voice**, which will bring you a tailored, relevant selection of articles each month direct to your inbox. The online *Voice* complements

our "**regular**" email updates, which are sent ad-hoc as needed, generally about twice a month in addition to the *Voice*.

If you wish to print a PDF version of this *Voice*, please [click here](#). You can also comment on articles on the website and read others' comments — just follow the link provided with each article. Brent Schnee ([editor@vahi.org](mailto:editor@vahi.org)) is the content editor for the online *Voice* and Brian Gross (me, [communications@vahi.org](mailto:communications@vahi.org)) is production editor.

In addition to the online edition, the VHCA will be publishing a **print version of the Voice** twice this year, once in advance of Summerfest and once in advance of Tour of Homes. Later this year the association Board will assess how and if it will continue with printed editions.

Finally, we're so excited to announce that the **VHCA website**, [www.vahi.org](http://www.vahi.org) has a completely new look, vastly expanded content, and is much easier to navigate. New content includes expanded News and Events content, new sections for Safety, Sidewalks, and Traffic, an A-Z of government services, and a Photo Gallery. The history and preservation content is being pulled over from the [lovevh.org](http://lovevh.org) site and will be vastly expanded, but you can already download the entire 11-part

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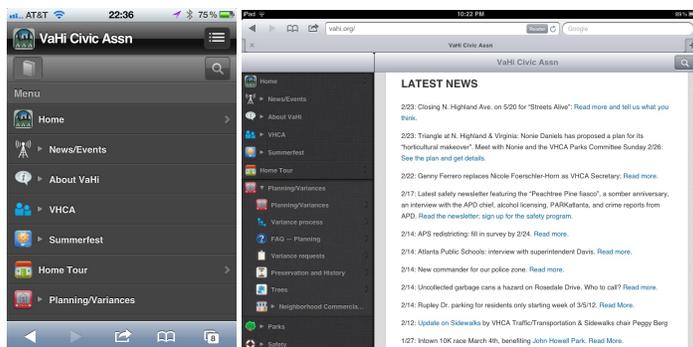


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series on VaHi history by Linda Merrill. There are even specially tailored versions for smartphones (whether you use an iPhone, Blackberry, or Android) and even for iPad!



[www.vahi.org](http://www.vahi.org) new website — click to enlarge



VHCA site on iPhone and iPad — click to enlarge

Many thanks to Ida Centner of [Centner Consulting](#) for creating the "bones" of the site, and to Phuong Nguyen of [Creative Crop](#) for the design.

We hope that our new trio of electronic media will provide the information that you, our audience, truly are looking for, with the timeliness and ease of access that best serves you.

## Officers' Corner

[Comment on and see comments](#) for this article

by *Lola Carlisle, Vice-President*



I'm new to the Virginia-Highland Civic Association Board but not new to the concept of community service. I've volunteered on various committees in Virginia-Highland over the last

12 years. I have always had a great deal of respect for the Virginia-Highland Civic Association Board and committee members. And after co-authoring a book on the history of Virginia-Highland, I know that the type of volunteerism and

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service we find in this neighborhood has deep, deep roots! I've had the pleasure of meeting many individuals who created, saved and shaped this great community. We are lucky.

This year's board has a lot of talent and we really need it to accomplish our goals. We're working hard to expand the membership and capacities of the committees, increase effectiveness, spread the workload, and bring in diverse skill sets. Please reach out to us at [board@vahi.org](mailto:board@vahi.org) to get involved. We are working to have more transparency and access to information – particularly financial and committee goals, which we will be updating regularly - and more opportunities for you to be heard. Be sure to visit [the new website](#) and send us your thoughts on what you'd like to see there.

The APS redistricting presents a huge challenge for us and our sister neighborhoods. I hope that our whole community can achieve positive results equal to the those of our predecessors. I imagine that this issue has ignited a sense of a need for engagement in many – an urge to step forward and act as opposed to react. I encourage you all to get involved. Make a call, send an email and find a place for yourself within the Civic Association. It doesn't have to be huge – starting small actually works best. You'll be inspired by most of the folks you'll work with and you'll learn new things – new tactics, new people, new vocabulary, new places – you get the idea. We look forward to hearing from you.

## Sidewalks

[Comment on and see comments for](#) this article

by *Peggy Berg, Traffic/Transportation & Sidewalks chair*



In Virginia-Highland, many sidewalks are in need of repair. Damage from property trees is the property owner's responsibility, and worn-out pavers and sewer issues, generally

speaking, are the property owner's responsibility, as well. Damage from right-of-way trees is a City responsibility.

The City has minimal budget and staffing, meaning that it cannot be proactive in response to these needs, but these factors mean their ability to be reactive is also limited.

The processes for the City to take care of sidewalk repair are as follows:

- Report issues to DPW on line or through PEDS

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(publicworks@atlantaga.gov or www.peds.org)

- Possible involvement of Parks regarding trees
- Receive inspection within 72 hours, unless there is tree involvement
- Receive price quote thereafter (standard 50 foot sidewalk costs about \$1000, which may be partially paid by the City, depending on tree damage)
- Property owner contracts with the City and pays the City for repair
- Wait

This approach is inefficient because repairs may be sporadic, and because of the wait.

An alternative to getting sidewalks repaired through the city is to privately contract sidewalk repair. However, the city requires contractor to:

- Post a large bond
- Provide architect- or engineer-stamped drawings
- Complete building permit process (which costs hours in City Hall)

We contacted 11 contractors, and NONE were willing to undertake sidewalk repair for a homeowner unless part of a major construction project. They can't cover the cost of taking the sidewalk through the City processes for the \$1000 standard sidewalk price.

Historically, sidewalk repair programs in VaHi have been less than successful.

A few years back, VHCA had a 50% cost matching program of up to \$500 for sidewalk replacement. There were few takers (less than 20 in 3 years), and some of those funded were doing sidewalks anyway. The worst sidewalks – those the VHCA would target – did not necessarily get repaired. Thus, the program was discontinued.

There must be a better way.

The Sidewalks Committee of the Virginia-Highlands Civic Association is currently developing a series of initiatives (already in progress) to address the continuing issue of sidewalks in disrepair:

#### **Current Initiative I: Major Streets**

On the major streets, bad spots on Virginia and North

Highland were identified, via a committee evaluation. All in all, there were some good responses from the neighborhood. Some property owners have already been approached and informed of the processes involved with initiating repairs through the city. Once the Board receives funding requests to begin repairs, we can then track the city's progress via the property owners to verify the sidewalks have been seen to.

### **Current Initiative II: Bundling Overcome barriers – Incent action**

Currently in progress is an informational packet for property owners describing how to incent repairs. The process would involve identifying a few blocks to bundle, concentrating on major streets first (those which are traffic-light controlled), followed by through-streets. In both cases, those streets with a high proportion of broken sidewalks would take precedence.

As of 2/14, the sidewalks committee had set criteria on and identified potential bundles throughout the neighborhood. Thus far, about 100 sidewalk segments have been identified for repair, beginning with St. Charles and Barnett near St. Charles (hopefully with more sections to follow).

If you would like the list of bundles (with accompanying photos), send an e-mail to [pegberg1111@gmail.com](mailto:pegberg1111@gmail.com)

### **Bundling next steps as of 2/14/12**

What happens next depends on the City's willingness to utilize our bundling plan. Alex Wan hosted a conference call with the Committee and agreed to talk to DPW about a bundled inspection with a committee member.

If accepted, we get pricing for each property in the bundle from the City and offer to work with each homeowner individually to get the bundle assembled.

If, however, the bundling plan does not go through, we can continue to pursue the idea by contacting each homeowner, asking them to start the process with the City, track the process with them, and encourage the City to notice the opportunity to save money by bundling construction

### **VHCA incentives**

Since most of the sidewalks at issue have some right-of-way tree involvement, at least partial City funding is involved. As the bundles take shape, VHCA will be working on a program to

pay a share of the property owner's portion of the cost. Shared 3 ways (though not necessarily evenly), property owners potentially get a \$1000 improvement for \$500 or less if they participate in the bundle. To do this, property owners must propose funding incentives to the Board once the structure of the funding is defined. However, the Board is tracking the Committee's progress, and a formal funding request to the Board will have to be approved prior to committing any funds.

## Goals

The primary goal is to fix the worst primary artery sidewalks in Virginia-Highland, followed by those around the community, utilizing the bundling plan. The idea is to set a process in place that is streamlined, easily repeatable, and can get more sidewalks fixed for the funds available.

## Safety: "See Something — Say Something"

[Comment on and see comments for this article](#)

*by John Wolfinger, Safety chair*



I continually get questions relating to our 911 system is some form or fashion. I hope I can clear up some things you may have been wondering about.

The most important myth to dispel is that, since we do not have a 311 call system for non-emergency situations – our 911 call system is the only way to reach APD and AFR for assistance. You are not going to “bother” the operators with non-emergency situations. The first person to answer will ascertain whether you need AFR for a fire or medical reason and will transfer your call to the AFR operators in the 911 center if appropriate. A medical call goes to the nearest AFR station and to the Grady ambulance center. The reason both are notified is that an AFR station may be much closer to your call site than a Grady truck at that moment. Also, AFR trucks do not have drugs or medications that may be needed and they do not transport to hospitals. Thus the reasoning for both units being initially summoned.

All other calls then go to APD for resolution. After the operator gets all the pertinent info, it is passed on to the dispatcher for the appropriate APD Zone. The dispatcher then rates the assistance call for timing of response. Naturally a crime in process or a life-threatening situation will take precedence over a car blocking your driveway. The dispatcher stays in contact with all field personnel in their Zone and knows the closest

available person for a response.

Even though there now seems to be very few times when the 911 system rings busy (as compared to a few years ago) stay on the line for your call to be answered. Hanging up and redialing means that you go to the end of the queue. A rainy, stormy Friday afternoon at rush hour with lots of auto accidents is a time when you may get a busy signal. Even though I don't think that the 911 call center is still fully staffed, there are now enough trained personnel to properly handle calls on a consistent basis.

The next issue is when to call. Whenever you find yourself wondering as to whether you should report a situation – the answer is yes. Your gut feeling has told you that something is not right, so go with a call. If you see someone acting suspiciously or that looks like they may need help, call and let APD handle it. The least that will happen is that an officer will have a conversation with that individual. This cannot hurt anyone and it helps the officer to get to know their assigned beat better. This is how crime prevention works and APD would always rather try to prevent a crime than try to catch a perp after the fact.

The amount of calls from an area also has a second purpose, in that they help the Zone Commander know where to concentrate personnel to combat problems. Unreported incidents not only allow the suspected person to get away – but also rob that area of added personnel.

If you sense that you are not getting across to the operator the seriousness of your call – do not hesitate to ask for a supervisor. You had a distinct reason for making a 911 call, so make sure it is followed up on.

For a complete listing of all APD phone numbers other than 911 –go to <http://www.atlantapd.org/phonedirectory.aspx> and also check out <http://www.atlantapd.org/FAQS.aspx> Take a look at these pages now, so that when you have a question you will know where to find the info you need.

If you have additional questions – please contact me at [safety@vahi.org](mailto:safety@vahi.org) to give me material for additional articles about this general subject. I want our neighborhood to be well-informed for the safety of all of us.

## Community calendar

**3/4:** [Intown Ten 10K race](#)

**3/7:** **VHCA Planning Meeting, note change of venue**

from Ponce de Leon Library to 1246 Virginia Ave. 7:00 PM.

The Planning committee will review cases as usual. There will also be a review of the Virginia-Highland Neighborhood Commercial ordinances provided by Aaron Fortner.

**3/12:** **VHCA meeting**, 7:00 PM, 980 Ponce de Leon Ave.

**3/18:** **Publix Georgia Marathon and Half-Marathon**. See [their website](#) for traffic and road closure information.

**4/28:** **Northside 5K: First of the "2012 Atlanta BeltLine Running Series"**

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