

MINUTES

Virginia-Highland Civic Association Board Meeting February 13, 2012; Ponce de Leon Library

CALL TO ORDER

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

The following board members were present:

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES, ETC.

The following items were approved without objection: the agenda attached hereto ("Addendum 1"); the minutes from the Board meeting of January 9, 2012; and the Board email action designating Genny Ferrero as the new Board secretary.

REPORTS

POLICE AND FIRE

Sergeant Bruce of the APD reported that Officer Joshua White is being appointed to an evening watch in the neighborhood. She further stated that the only significant crime reported in the past month includes car break-ins and similar property crimes.

CITY AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

District 6 Councilmember Alex Wan discussed several items. First, he reminded everyone that the renewal of the penny sales tax related to water/sewer improvements is on the ballot in the upcoming March 6, 2012 primary election. He noted that this is intended to be the last renewal, and that the sales tax will remain at its current rate of 8% if approved. In response to a question from Ms. Papner, Mr. Wan stated that he did not know the status of the bonds, but would follow up.

Mr. Wan further discussed the status of sidewalks in the neighborhood. Because Ms. Berg is working to improve the state of sidewalks on the Safety Committee, Mr. Wan clarified that sidewalk repair is the responsibility of homeowners, unless a tree within the right of way has damaged a sidewalk in question. The City can pursue independent remedies in egregious situations, Mr. Wan explained, but the City must handle these issues on a case-by-case basis, which is not cost effective.

At Mr. Wolfinger's request, Mr. Wan noted that there is currently a task force to re-visit the alcohol code (City of Atlanta Alcohol Technical Advisory Group, "ATAG"), and to determine if any measures can be instituted to help neighborhoods and communities pursue and revoke/deny licenses when there are infractions. Dianne Olansky, former NPU-F Chair (and its current License & Permits Chair), represents District 6. A public hearing will be held on February 3 from 6-8 pm in council chambers; another will follow at Inman in March.

VHCA COMMITTEE REPORTS

PLANNING

The only item on the agenda relates to the change-of-agent designation on the alcohol license currently held by the CVS at 865 N. Highland Avenue. Tyler Mann from Troutman Sanders LLP appeared on behalf of CVS. He explained that the change in agent is purely due to the fact that a new store manager (who has been an employee with CVS since 2000) has been hired, and that there are no prior violations by CVS relating to the license in question. Ms. Papner inquired as to what percentage of total sales at the CVS store relates to liquor. Mr. Mann stated that it is definitely 5% or less, although he did not know the specific numbers. Mr. Mann further stated that there is a training program at CVS to ensure that all managers comply with any liquor license requirements. Ms. Carlisle moved that we approve change of agent. Mr. Wolfinger seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Gross noted that the new website for the VHCA is in place on a private server and should be up and running in about a week. There will be various updates later this month to several of the pages, and Mr. Gross offered to make any update requests in the interim. Mr. Gross further advised that there is currently a database of 2500 people for electronic newsletter, and that pricing for electronic advertising is available. He welcomed any suggestions on how to reach more people.

SUMMERFEST

Ms. Papner advised that all new committee members for Summerfest 2012 will commence bi-monthly meetings on February 22, 2012. Summerfest is currently scheduled for June 2 and 3, and the community dinner is scheduled for June 1. Ms. Papner is targeting March 1 for the official press release.

BUDGET

The proposed budget is now completed, and Mr. Dworet will post updated balance sheets on web as soon as tomorrow. (See additional discussion regarding budget, below.)

EDUCATION

Ms. Forschler-Horn provided an update on the current redistricting process underway by Atlanta Public Schools ("APS"). After much communication and numerous petitions submitted on behalf of the various affected neighborhoods, APS has recently released two new redistricting maps. In March, the APS Interim Superintendent Erroll Davis will submit his own redistricting map, which may or may not be based upon the two most recent maps currently before him. His goal is that a final recommendation will be made to the Board of Education in April, which will vote on the new zones at that time. APS has stated that it will not address the allocation of SPLOST money until all new zones are set.

Ms. Foerschler-Horn noted that this presentation discussion was intended purely for informational purposes and that it does not reflect the position or statement(s) of the Board at this time.

SAFETY

Ms. Berg first addressed streets. After providing a list of issues requiring attention to a representative at the City's Department of Public Works, Ms. Berg has been working diligently with the City to ensure that the most pressing items are addressed. The issues presented by Ms. Berg to the City include, among other things, missing street signs, faded dividing lines on streets, a solar powered sign to notify drivers of their speed, and efforts to make the turning lane safer at the corner of Park and Elkmont.

With regard to sidewalks, Ms. Berg noted that there are a large number of sidewalks in the neighborhood that are in need of repair. She explained that sidewalk issues are divided from a repair perspective into two groups: homeowner responsibility and City responsibility. Complicating this is the City's limited budget, minimal staffing, and inability to be proactive. Ms. Berg noted that, because the process is somewhat difficult to navigate, she would like the Board to assist Virginia-Highland residents by providing necessary information through two initiatives: (1) a Major Streets Initiative, whereby the Board identifies those areas on high-traffic pedestrian streets that are in the greatest disrepair and be very proactive by providing homeowners with information to help them get their sidewalks repaired; and (2) a "bundling of sidewalk sites", whereby the Board facilitates an effort to handle various sidewalk areas in bulk, which may result in lower costs and provide homeowners with further incentives to ensure that sidewalks are in proper repair. Mr. Wan has agreed to speak to the Department of Public Works to assist in facilitating the bundling initiative. One of the audience members questioned whether Ms. Berg had investigated the availability of grant money; Mr. White and Ms. Berg asked the gentleman to email them with any information relating to the availability of such grant money.

STREETS ALIVE

After meeting with Streets Alive representatives to gather information regarding the event, Ms. Berg has proposed that the festival be held May 20, 2012. The event is contemplated to take place on North Highland from Ponce de Leon Avenue, and would extend northward to Drewry, or even as far as Aurora coffee shop. The event will be held from 2-6 PM. Atlanta has held this previously in the downtown area. Rebecca Cerna made a presentation in support of the Streets Alive event, and the Board is awaiting event leaflets with further details.

An audience member suggested that the Board speak to people who live on neighboring streets who may have traffic issues. Although the Board is not the organizer of this event, Mr. White stated that it would ask the organizers to inform all neighbors of the relevant facts.

PARKS

Ms. Fralick discussed some planned projects, including the addition of new plant material to the Triangle utilizing a plan being developed by Nonie Daniel and repairing benches along the Streetscape. At least one community work day will be scheduled. Mr. White stated that the Parks Committee is developing a comprehensive plan for John Howell Park; a number of issues have been identified, and further meetings are scheduled with citizens and landscape professionals. Budget proposals will follow as plans are refined and reviewed with those groups and the City of Atlanta Parks Department.

With respect to Orme Park, Mr. White noted that its support group will be holding service days both this spring and fall; only small amounts of funding are anticipated there for this year. VHCA's park funding will focus on John Howell. Mr. White stated that the Parks Committee is examining some of the issues in the strip of park property located along the median in Lanier Boulevard.

OLD BUSINESS - BUDGET AND STRATEGIC GOALS REVIEW

Mr. White presented the budget and moved its adoption; Mr. Dworet seconded the motion.

Mr. White stated that the working budget conservatively assumes a net income from Summerfest of \$137,000, and a net income for the Tour of Homes that is much lower than last year's record-setting event. It includes a \$20,000 allocation to support neighborhood education (including any research or legal activities that might be needed), \$75,000 loan service for New Highland Park, \$14,000 for discretionary board grants, funds overdue and much-requested repairs to park benches and the procurement of the association's liability and board insurance policies.

Ms. Fralick moved to implement a minor revision to the budget as it relates to Parks. She explained that the budget currently provides \$965 for the beautification of the Triangle at Virginia and Highland, but she has determined that it will require an additional \$135 for plantings. Mr. Wolfinger seconded the motion. It was approved unanimously and the budget was so amended.

Mr. White then recognized Mr. Wolfinger for an amendment. Mr. Wolfinger moved that the budget be amended to include a board grant of \$3600 to support the general operating costs of Fight Back Against Crime ("FBAC") Virginia-Highland. David Wolfson seconded the motion.

A discussion ensued regarding the proposed amendment. Mr. Gross noted that the \$3600 to be allocated to FBAC would fund the addition of two patrol shifts in the upcoming year – one on the north side and one on the south side. He explained that the majority of the money received by FBAC is used to pay officers for their patrol time. He further explained that the officers hired by FBAC are APD officers, who carry with them the insurance the City provides. Although the officers only respond to specific calls from paying members, he believes that they also provide service to the entire neighborhood because they generally patrol the streets and look for suspicious activity.

Various concerns were expressed by citizens and Board members, including: (a) why the cars utilized by FBAC are unmarked, when all neighboring communities use marked cars that may be more effective in controlling crime; (b) the absence of a consensus that funding additional patrols will actually protect the entire neighborhood; (c) whether funding patrols – instead of donating funds to purchase specific items for FBAC – would expose the Board to liability and frivolous lawsuits; and (d) the appropriateness of using general funds of the association to support activities that are not uniformly available to all association members.

Several community members spoke in support of and in opposition to the proposed amendment.

After considerable discussion, the question was called and the motion was defeated, 5-6; Ms. Berg, Mr. Glancy, Mr. Gross, Mr. Wolfinger, and Mr. Wolfson voted in favor; Ms. Carlisle, Mr. Dworet, Ms. Ferrero, Ms. Forschler-Horn, Ms. Papner, and Mr. White voted against.

A second motion was made by Mr. White and seconded by Ms. Carlisle to accept the proposed budget as prepared. The motion was approved 7-3; Ms. Carlisle, Mr. Dworet, Ms. Ferrero, Ms. Forschler-Horn, Ms. Papner, Mr. White, and Mr. Wolfson voted in favor; Mr. Glancy and Mr. Wolfinger voted against. Mr. Gross abstained.

NEW BUSINESS / CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

- A. Mr. Glancy is holding the Intown 10K road race; more information is available online at www.intown10.com. The cost is \$40 per person. He is currently looking for volunteers March 4. He estimates it will net \$10,000 to \$15,000, which will be donated to VHCL for use at John Howell Park.
- B. Mr. Dworet commented that there are old Summerfest banners that need to be discarded and questioned whether they can they be recycled. Ms. Papner noted that Dave FM pays for the signs, so they should be recycled, and that the logos are different from year to year, so they cannot be reused.
- C. Ms. Carlisle noted that there will be a presentation on the Neighborhood Commercial zoning code at the next planning meeting on March 7, 2012. The meeting is open to all residents; board members are particularly encouraged to attend.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:37 PM.