



## Strategic Plan 2025-2026

### 1. Governance Update

In September 2025, the Virginia-Highland Civic Association (VHCA, a 501(c)(4)) and Virginia-Highland Conservation League (VHCL, a 501(c)(3)) completed an organizational consolidation.

VHCA was formed as a 501(c)(4) in 1972, when prevailing IRS rules made 501(c)(3) status impractical for an advocacy-driven civic association. The 2025 consolidation provided the most efficient path to a long-overdue conversion. VHCL was the surviving legal entity and retained its EIN, 26-4175136. The combined organization adopted the VHCA name and amended its governing documents so that the surviving 501(c)(3)'s mission and scope reflect VHCA's 50+ years of civic, programmatic, and stewardship work in the community.

The consolidated entity can now accept tax-deductible donations, qualify for a broader range of grants, and operate more efficiently, while continuing our long-standing role as the neighborhood's civic voice. Separately, the original 501(c)(4) was renamed Virginia-Highland Residents Coalition (VHRC) and now serves as a special-purpose entity holding title to North Highland Park. This structure shields the real property from operational liability while keeping all programmatic, fundraising, and grant activity within VHCA.

### 2. Financial Summary

VHCA enters 2026 in strong financial health following our September 2025 consolidation and a successful Tour of Homes. Combined cash and investments across VHCA and VHRC as of January 31, 2026 is \$300,607 against \$30,721 in liabilities representing restricted donations owed to our subsidiary Friends of John Howell Park. This is a healthy position that provides stability as we navigate the year ahead.

The consolidation successfully streamlined our finances and structure. We now operate with clearer processes, stronger oversight, and the ability to accept tax-deductible donations and apply for grants -- all critical tools for long-term sustainability. The

Finance Committee is building systems that balance rigor and transparency with simplicity, recognizing that our all-volunteer board needs processes that are both robust and sustainable. We're committed to monthly reporting and conservative cash management as we work to re-evaluate and diversify our income streams while serving our mission and maintaining the programs most vital to the neighborhood.

### 3. Strategic Priorities

In the 2025-2026 term, VHCA will focus on three core outcomes:

#### **Build a financially sustainable organization**

We're strengthening financial processes to give you confidence in how your contributions are used, diversifying revenue beyond our two major events, and building reserves to weather uncertainty. Success means transparent monthly reporting, a balanced budget with healthy reserves, and reduced dependence on volunteer-intensive fundraisers.

#### **Preserve what makes Virginia-Highland special**

We'll protect the historic character, walkable streets, and green spaces that define our neighborhood. This means thoughtful stewardship of our three parks, advocacy on zoning and development issues, and celebrating our unique history. Success means well-maintained parks that serve as community gathering places, development that respects neighborhood character, and residents who understand and value our history.

#### **Strengthen community connection and engagement**

We're creating more ways for you to stay informed, get involved, and shape the neighborhood's future. This includes better communication tools, support for local schools, and volunteer opportunities that match busy schedules. Success means more residents actively engaged in civic life, strong partnerships with neighborhood schools, and clear channels for your voice to be heard.

The strategic priorities above guide all committee work. Financial sustainability, preservation efforts, and community engagement are the threads that run through everything we do -- from parks maintenance to education grants to event planning.

### 4. Committee Goals & Plans

#### **Committee: Communications**

**Chair:** Amy Harward | [communications@vahi.org](mailto:communications@vahi.org)

## Overview

The Communications Committee ensures residents, businesses, and stakeholders stay well-informed and engaged in the civic life of our vibrant community. We support both internal committee communication and outward-facing community engagement.

## Goals

- Build VHCA brand trust and awareness through The Voice newsletter and social media
- Streamline and optimize vahi.org website for better user experience
- Support smooth transition to Google Workspace for secure, accessible documentation
- Streamline event promotion processes with documented campaigns, tools, and resources
- Reduce communication costs by leveraging free 501(c)(3) software options

## **Committee: Education & Grants**

**Chairs:** Melissa Clark & Amy Harward | [education@vahi.org](mailto:education@vahi.org)

## Overview

The Education & Grants Committee supports neighborhood schools—Virginia-Highland Elementary, Springdale Park Elementary (SPARK), David T. Howard Middle School, and Midtown High School—through grants, advocacy, and community engagement.

## Goals

- Increase annual grants budget to \$5,000 to meet growing demand
- Fund projects benefiting students at all four neighborhood schools
- Share success stories through Communications Committee collaboration
- Host forum with Board of Education representatives and Superintendent

## 2024-2025 Impact

Total Grants Given: \$4,500 distributed across Midtown (\$1,000), Howard (\$750), SPARK (\$500), VHE (\$500), Morningside Community Foundation (\$500), Grace Lutheran (\$250), and Firestation #19 (\$419.55-includes gift card fees).

## **Committee: Finance**

**Chairs:** Adam Faust, Rob Glancy, Mary Frances Jones | [budget@vahi.org](mailto:budget@vahi.org)

**Other Committee Members:** Karri Hobson-Pape, Kevin Cronin, Robin Ragland

## Overview

The Finance Committee ensures the financial health and sustainability of VHCA. Following our successful consolidation with Virginia-Highland Conservation League, we're actively working to build better financial processes and diversify revenues to ensure long-term stability and flexibility to support our mission.

### Goals

- Improve transparency by sharing monthly budget vs. actuals and annual financial summaries on [vahi.org](http://vahi.org)
- Align budget with strategic priorities through board discussion and conservative cash management
- Diversify revenue streams beyond Tour of Homes and Summerfest
- Streamline financial structure and document institutional knowledge in the existing Treasurer's Manual

### **Committee: History & Preservation**

**Chair:** Karri Hobson-Pape | [history@vahi.org](mailto:history@vahi.org)

### Overview

The History & Preservation Committee preserves and celebrates Virginia-Highland's unique story as a National Historic Register neighborhood. Past successes include Fire Station #19 renovation, Tour of Homes historic write-ups, and installation of historic markers.

### Goals

- Train and mentor new neighbors passionate about neighborhood history
- Create Virginia-Highland History Factoid Yard Signs for community events
- Plan and host Virginia-Highland History Tour Weekend in February 2026
- Develop strategy for new historic signs (Dr. Leila Denmark home, Bowers v. Hardwick residence)
- Collaborate with Atlanta History Center, Atlanta Preservation Society, and Archive Atlanta
- Research and document local stories through digital and social channels

### **Committee: Parks**

**Chair:** Miguel Barrios | [parks@vahi.org](mailto:parks@vahi.org)

### Overview

Our parks are central to the community's identity, daily life, and ecological health. Each space plays a distinct role: North Highland Park serves as a flexible community node; Orme Park offers a naturalized retreat with significant ecological potential; and John Howell Park provides essential recreation and gathering space. Ongoing stewardship,

including routine pruning, planting, maintenance, and volunteer engagement, remains a priority across all three parks.

We aim to balance thoughtful preservation with expanded community use and enhanced environmental resilience. This includes exploring appropriate programming and small-scale events at North Highland Park, supporting continued maintenance efforts at John Howell Park, and assessing long-term ecological and structural needs at Orme Park. Together, these efforts reflect a commitment to maintaining safe, welcoming parks that contribute to the social, cultural, and environmental vitality of Virginia-Highland.

## Goals

### *North Highland Park*

- Maintain routine pruning, planting, and upkeep
- Explore community programming appropriate for the space (weddings, movies, seasonal sales, holiday ceremonies) while respecting neighbors
- Implement utility box paintings

### *Orme Park*

- Evaluate community support for an Ecological Assessment and Master Plan addressing naturalized areas, bridge renovation, access safety, aesthetics, vegetation health, and invasive species management
- Organize volunteer days with Friends of Orme Park for plantings and cleanups

### *John Howell Park*

- Maintain routine pruning, planting, mulching, and upkeep
- Collaborate with Friends of John Howell Park LLC on it's capital campaign and Phase 1 implementation

## **Committee: Planning & Land Use**

**Chair:** Kevin Cronin | [planning@vahi.org](mailto:planning@vahi.org)

## Overview

The Planning & Land Use Committee provides oversight and review of all variance requests, special exceptions, rezoning applications, and land-use proposals. We evaluate impacts to the neighborhood resulting from the City's Comprehensive Development Plan and related planning documents, and promote adherence to the Virginia-Highland Master Plan in all planning and zoning matters.

Our work focuses on three key areas: reviewing applications and representing VHCA at city meetings, tracking policy and development impacts on the neighborhood, and educating residents about planning issues that affect them.

## Goals

- Review variance, special exception, and liquor license applications; provide timely recommendations to the VHCA Board
- Represent the Association at NPU-F meetings on all items affecting Virginia-Highland and provide Board updates
- Attend relevant BZA meetings to advocate for VHCA positions and monitor trends
- Track public policies affecting land use, zoning, transportation, and environmental issues
- Monitor commercial node development to ensure minimal impact on residents and traffic, prioritizing Atkins Park node improvements
- Maintain updated records of businesses in each NC node and share with the City
- Expand the database of traffic volumes, flows, and impacts for future analysis
- Inform residents about public education policies and planning-related impacts
- Respond to citizen complaints regarding potential building code violations
- Track BeltLine developments, CDP updates, and citywide transportation initiatives
- Uphold the rule of law in all building and zoning matters while advocating for appropriate changes
- Educate residents about inadequate onsite stormwater management challenges
- Promote fairness, respect, and neighbor-to-neighbor consideration in all matters

## **Committee: Safe Streets**

**Chairs:** Amy Harward & Jen Hardwick | safestreets@vahi.org

## Overview

The Safe Streets Committee promotes safe, accessible, and sustainable mobility throughout Virginia-Highland. We focus on pedestrian safety, bicycle and transit infrastructure, and engagement with the City of Atlanta on traffic and street design.

## Goals

- Gather meaningful feedback on Virginia Avenue bike lane pilot from neighbors, schools, and businesses
- Evaluate pilot program renewal and coordinate with ATL DOT and Midtown Neighbors Association
- Explore strengthening connection with Virginia-Highland Security Patrol (VHSP)
- Encourage resident involvement through committee participation

## **Committee: Tour of Homes**

## Overview

The Tour of Homes is VHCA's largest annual fundraiser and one of Atlanta's most cherished holiday traditions. The event showcases our architectural charm and community spirit while raising critical funds for civic improvements, parks, safety, education, and neighborhood nonprofits. The 2025 Tour of Homes was the most successful Tour in our organization's history and sets the stage for an exciting future.

## Goals

- Start early with February committee kickoff to secure homes and sponsors
- Maintain year-round sponsor relationships with warm communication and early renewal invitations
- Build partnerships with builders, designers, and architects for early home selection
- Create an operational playbook documenting volunteer coordination, vendor processes, and best practices
- Develop a content calendar template for future committees

## **Committee: Summerfest**

### Overview

For 40 years, Summerfest has been Virginia-Highland's signature event -- a neighborhood festival built for and by neighborhood volunteers. This year, the board faced a difficult budget decision. The financial picture has changed dramatically: increased competition from citywide festivals, including some in our neighborhood, has hurt sponsor revenue and driven down margins while operating costs have continued to climb. At the same time, volunteer participation has steadily declined.

We voted to move forward with the 2026 event. Summerfest is more than a line item -- it's a 40-year tradition that brings the community together. But the current model faces sustainability challenges. It's not an exaggeration to say the event's future depends on increased volunteer participation and community support to reimagine this event with a more profitable model in order to keep it alive.

### Goals

- Build a sustainable volunteer base: Recruit 15+ new volunteers, document processes, and establish succession planning for key coordinator roles
- Strengthen financial controls: Implement clear approval processes for contracts and expenditures, track budgets in real-time, and complete reconciliation within 30 days

- Improve operational execution: Finalize vendor contracts early, create master timeline with clear owners, and hold weekly committee check-ins
- Evaluate long-term sustainability: Assess whether current model is viable given market conditions and volunteer capacity, recommend path forward by September 2026

## 5. Looking Ahead

The 2025-2026 term is an opportunity for VHCA to focus on strengthening our financial systems, diversifying revenue streams, and enhancing community engagement. By maintaining a clear focus on our strategic priorities and collaborating across committees, we will ensure Virginia-Highland continues to thrive as one of Atlanta's most vibrant, connected, and well-preserved neighborhoods.

This plan was developed by our board of resident volunteers. Its successful implementation depends on the active participation of our community. We encourage you to get involved – join a committee, volunteer for an event, or simply share your feedback. Reach us at [board@vahi.org](mailto:board@vahi.org). Your involvement is the foundation of Virginia-Highland's success!