

HIGHLANDS COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION' (HCA)

Fall 2021 Meeting Minutes
Virtual ZOOM Meeting
October 20, 2021 @ 700PM

Denison Hatch, President; John Gavenonis, VP; Mike Drake, Treasurer; Margaret Sears Lindley, Secretary; Benjamin Wagner, Communications; Lindsey DiSabatino, Youth Activities VP; Teresa Kenny, VP Youth Involvement; Allison Cassidy, Food Drive Chair, Adrienne Casale, VP Real Estate & Zoning; (open) 8th District Neighborhood Planning Council.

AGENDA

Denison Hatch, HCA President

Denison welcomed HCA members to the meeting. This session marks the third virtual meeting (Zoom) since the beginning of the pandemic. Meeting minutes will be available on the HCA website.

- The Association's finances are in good shape with no need to assess dues currently.
- Denison urged everyone to contribute to the upcoming annual fall food drive (Nov 18-21) and the neighborhood Halloween parade at the Delaware Art Museum on October 24.

Lindsay DiSabatino - HCA Events

- Lindsay encouraged everyone to come out on Sunday to cheer on the kids who will be competing for the best costumes at the annual Halloween parade. The event takes place on Sunday, October 24, at 2 pm at the Delaware Art Museum. It will include music and candy and a variety of family-oriented activities. Donations of money and candy are welcome (you can contribute at the event). For more information or to contribute, please get in touch with Lindsey at lindseydisab@gmail.com
- The Annual Highlands Fall Food Drive will take place November 18-21 this year. You can drop off non-perishable food and checks (made out to the Delaware Food Bank) at 1420 Hamilton Street (front porch), or a volunteer will pick up donations. For more information or to arrange for a pickup, contact Allison Cassidy – acassidy21@gmail.com.

Adrian Casale – HCA Development

Adrian updated the HCA on three projects of interest:

- The Forty-Acres Firehouse (1814 Gilpin). The new owner, Dr. Doug Patterson, reports that interior construction has begun, as has the cleanup and demolition of rotted interior walls. In addition, the city's architecture review board is reviewing the exterior plans. Once approved, work on the roofs and exterior waterproofing will begin.
- 62 Rockford Road. Rockford Mills LLC (Tsionas Management) acquired the property in early October 2021. For now, the building will remain a commercial property
- Gibraltar. Robert Herrera's group 9SDC is working with civil and planning engineers to draw up revised plans for the site after meeting with community members in June 2021. Nathan Field noted that the group has a sales agreement in place, but that Herrera has not purchased the Gibraltar property. Herrera has told Councilman Field that nothing new will happen until January or February 2022.

Benjamin Wagner – HCA Communications

- The HCA website reaches about 1000 neighbors, about 40-60% of whom regularly check the site.
- The website now includes an events calendar, news, information, and stories about the community, and minutes from the HCA meetings.
- The recent HCA survey results are available online, including over 100 write-in comments from respondents (11% participation overall). The survey indicated that neighbors think our elected officials are doing a moderate-to good job representing us. They would like to see more frequent HCA events and communications. Top neighborhood concerns include crime, traffic, and real estate development. (See www.highlandscommunityassociation.org/highlands-community-survey/)
- Season 2 of Highlands LIVE! will kick off on Wednesday, October 27 at 7 pm with The Honorable Mike Purzycki, Mayor. Future guests will include REACH Riverside Chairman Charlie McDowell and entrepreneur Vance Kershner.

Mike Purzycki, Mayor, City of Wilmington

- Mayor Purzycki updated the HCA with a personal anecdotal story about observing how active and "alive" the city has become at night, not just at the Riverfront. Market Street, Maker's Alley (N. Orange St), and the Torbert Street Society (305 Torbert Street) are bustling as more residents live in the city and socialize at night. In addition, many public events have returned, such as Shakespeare in the Park at Rodney Square.
- The mayor noted that Wilmington could be one of this country's finest medium-sized cities. However, the city's major challenge remains that of finding imaginative solutions for controlling crime. The Mayor believes that the city must strive for better neighborhood environments that include clean, attractive streets, rehabbed homes, and access to health care, training, and employment opportunities. Data from across the county suggests that cities with rebuilt neighborhoods see a 20-30% decrease in crime. That's why the Mayor will direct much of Wilmington's American Rescue Plan funding to cleaning up priority areas. This effort also includes partnerships with the State Housing Agency and partners such as Habitat for Humanity.
- Meanwhile, the 76ers Field House is active. The Salvation Army is building a new headquarters nearby. In addition, the city has about 1000 new apartments in the queue.
- HBCU week brought 30 college recruiters to town who offered places to 524 students on the spot among the 5000 who attended the event. In addition, students received 478 scholarship offers totaling \$10 million.
- The Mayor noted the upcoming 100th anniversary of the Wilmington Fire Department, marked with a "mega" parade on Saturday morning. "There won't be a kid in the world who won't remember this forever," he declared.

Captain Wilfredo Campos – Wilmington Police Department

- Captain Campos has been the Highlands (District 19) police captain for three and a half years. His responsibilities include Police Districts 17, 18, and 19.
- Fortunately, in District 19 we have very little violent crime. The challenges here involve vehicles: theft from cars and theft of cars left running, or robbery of cars with keys in the glove compartment. The latter comprise 80% of stolen vehicles in the city.

- The police urge residents to report crime or suspicious incidents to track criminal activity and deploy police resources effectively. Captain Campos noted that Ring/Nest videos are "tremendous help" as they give officers a better idea of the individuals they are hoping to track down. Communication with the police is critical as we approach the holiday season and see an uptick in porch package theft.
- The police arrested two individuals who were stealing catalytic converters from cars, including a few at the Devon.
- In response to a question, Captain Campos acknowledged that speeding vehicles in the Highlands continues to be an issue. The police work with the traffic divisions to monitor traffic loads and conduct speed enforcement in response to complaints. At present, city laws prevent the use of speed bumps. Also, Pennsylvania Avenue is a state road under the jurisdiction of DELDOT.

Elizabeth (Bessie) Speers – Tower Hill, Head of School

- Bessie Speers echoed neighborhood concerns about traffic and speed on 17th Street, noting that student safety by the school is the one issue that keeps her up at night. Tower Hill continues to look at creative solutions to the traffic problems near the Tower Hill School campus. She appealed to neighbors to share their ideas about ways to balance pedestrians and cars to keep everyone safe. Bessie emphasized that the school is dedicated to being an integral part of the Highlands community and takes seriously its role as a collegial, responsible neighbor.
- Bessie noted that the school would keep the school athletic track open during daylight hours for the community's enjoyment.

Nathan Field – 8th District Councilman, City of Wilmington

Councilman Field's updates included the following:

- The footbridge across the Brandywine that provides access to Alapocas Woods sustained significant damage during last month's flood and has been closed. FEMA recently inspected the footbridge. Unfortunately, it appears that designing, planning, and coordinating the repair or replacement of the bridge will take time and require yet-unsecured funds. Councilman Field is working with State Senator McBride to find ways to expedite the work.
- The stairs that connect the Greenway trail to the swing bridge are due to be completed in the Spring.

- The Stapler Park basketball court is due for repairs, and bids are now going out. Also, funding to redo Stapler Park's sidewalks has now been reallocated from another project, thanks to Representative Gerald Brady.
- Repaving Mill Road is a huge priority now that 400 new residents live at the old Bancroft Mill site.

James Spadola – Councilman at Large, City of Wilmington

Councilman Spadola updated the HCA on two pieces of legislation that recently passed in the City Council:

1) Police quotas are now banned. This measure gives police officers better discretion about arrests. It also helps ensure that police do not arbitrarily issue citations at the end of each month.

2) The city has now mandated ethics training for all elected city officials and employees. Spadola noted that city employees working on large contracts should know how to recognize a conflict of interest.

Gerald Brady – Delaware State Representative

- State Rep Gerald Brady apologized to the HCA for email remarks that were the subject of an ethics complaint last summer. The Delaware House Ethics Committee decided not to issue punishment against Brady, who is not running for reelection.
- Brady noted that new State revenue estimates will be published in December following last summer's approval of an unprecedented \$4.77B budget, \$1.35B of which was for capital programs. Projections indicate that the State will see a substantial surplus (\$550 million) that will help fulfill long-deferred maintenance projects.
- In the Highlands, funds will go to Stapler Park and Tilton Park on Broom Street.
- The Union Street realignment project (WILMAPCO) will take place over the next few years. Virtual public workshops are now being scheduled (see www.wilmapco.org) for public participation and thoughts on ways to improve the safety, livability, and vitality of Union Street.
- The Delaware General Assembly will reconvene in November. It will act on reapportionment, a required redrawing of legislative districts based on the most recent federal Census data. The Highlands District is slated to become

part of the 12th District, which Representative Krista Griffith currently represents. See legis.delaware.gov for the proposed maps.

Sarah McBride

Senator McBride mentioned several projects and legislation of note.

- In addition to the Union Street realignment project (see Gerald Brady above), Sen McBride has been working on capping I-95. The initiative involves putting a ceiling on the subterranean portions of I-95 with a park on top---to reunite neighborhoods that 1960s I-95 construction severed. The Senator will be holding public discussions on the project to be announced on social media.
- Working with Governor Carney, Sen McBride helped secure ten days of paid sick time for K-12 public school educators in Delaware through December 31. This measure will give teachers who have COVID symptoms time to stay home and quarantine.
- This session, Gov Carney signed legislation that significantly expands telehealth in Delaware. In addition, the bill creates a program for mental health services and vocational training for youth reentering society from the juvenile justice system. The legislation also empowers the State to attract more dental providers to practice in Delaware.
- In preparation for the January legislative session, Sen McBride is working on several initiatives, including a provision to provide auto insurance for youth aging out of foster care, legislation to establish statewide digital citizenship standards for K-12 schools, pay equity, and mental health education. Sen McBride is also tracking President Biden's Build Back better initiative. She hopes to help make Delaware the 10th State in the nation with a paid family and medical leave program. She noted that providing support for families and workers is necessary to attract the next generation of workers.