

MINUTES  
**HIGHLANDS COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION (HCA)**

Spring 2022 Meeting  
Delaware Art Museum  
April 27, 2022 @ 700PM

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

**AGENDA**

**Denison Hatch, HCA President**

Denison welcomed everyone to the first in-person meeting of the HCA since Autumn 2019.

In Mike Drake's absence, Denison gave the Treasurer's report. The current HCA balance is \$26,905 between unrestricted and restricted funds. The HCA has received \$1,745 since October and has had expenses of \$589.90.

**Lindsay DiSabatino - HCA Events**

The Highlands Easter Egg Hunt on April 3, 2022 was a huge success. Two hundred twenty-five children participated in the egg hunt (seeking 6,000 eggs!), supported by 49 volunteers. The Highlands neighborhood donated more supplies than were needed for the event, so the surplus will be held for the Halloween parade in the fall of 2022. The Delaware Art Museum may require participants to register in advance. The Museum may also require HCA to obtain an insurance rider for liability coverage for the events.

**Allison Cassidy – Highlands Food Drive**

Food insecurity in Delaware is a severe challenge, with more than 114,000 residents who need assistance. The semi-annual Highlands Food Drive will be from May 19 to May 22, 2022. Food donations and checks will be collected at 1420 Hamilton Street (front porch). For more information, contact Allison Cassidy at [acassidy21@gmail.com](mailto:acassidy21@gmail.com).

The most needed items are canned goods, beans, cereal, pasta, fruit juices, and granola bars. Checks are very welcome and can be made out to the Food Bank of Delaware that is able to purchase food at bulk prices.

### **Nathan Field – 8<sup>th</sup> District City Councilman**

Councilman Field reported on several items of neighborhood interest:

The Alapocas Footbridge: The good news is that the bridge, damaged in last year's flood, will be replaced. The bad news is that the reconstruction won't take place until 2024. The State has determined that the cheapest and fastest way to replace the bridge is to rebuild it from scratch.

The City hopes to provide a footpath between Mill Road and Brandywine Park for residents. A promising solution may be an old pathway that mill workers once used. The City hopes this pathway can be cleared and opened later this year.

The 155<sup>th</sup> Annual Memorial Day parade, a Wilmington tradition since 1868, will take place at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument on May 30, 2022, at 6 pm. The parade starts at Delaware Avenue and Woodlawn Avenue and proceeds down Delaware Avenue to the Civil War monument on Broom Street. Everyone is encouraged to turn out!

Highlands residents are encouraged to use the City's Public Works Call Center – **JUST DIAL 311**. This line is the most efficient way to obtain service and register complaints with the City.

Councilman Field reminded residents that he produces a semi-monthly newsletter to help keep Highland's neighborhood informed of events and newsworthy developments in the City. All are invited to sign up for the e-newsletter. Contact Nathan Field at [NRField@WilmingtonDE.gov](mailto:NRField@WilmingtonDE.gov).

### **James Spadola – Councilman at Large**

James reminded the group that he is one of four at-large Wilmington councilmen. Recently, Al Mills was appointed to fill an open seat due to one Councilman's resignation.

The City has created a Down Payment Assistance Program for first-time Delaware home buyers. Qualified participants can receive up to \$15,000 in assistance.

Earlier this year, the Wilmington City Council recently passed 6-4 a “no confidence” resolution against the Wilmington Police Chief Robert Tracy. Councilmen Spadola and Field voted against the resolution. In a prior public statement, Mayor Mike Purzycki said the no-confidence vote does a terrible disservice to the reputation of Tracy, who has served the City well and has the Mayor’s unqualified support.

The 2022 Wilmington City budget is \$242.2 M, a 7.5% increase over last year. Councilman Spadola said that an unavoidable structural deficit would be coming within a few years.

### **James Berryhill for State Senator (SD 1) Sarah McBride**

James Berryhill reported on the senator’s 2022 agenda, which includes the following bill she is sponsoring for the state legislature:

- HB 1 expanded education and mental health services in schools passed
- HB 17 - expand Medicaid coverage to students
- HB (TBD) - digital training for schools
- SB 151 - expand auto insurance for foster children

Senator McBride is also lobbying for the expansion of licensure of dentists and a bill to ensure that every new home is EV capable.

Later, Senator McBride will comment on road project allotments available in July.

### **Bud Friel, Delaware State Representative**

Representative Friel expressed his thanks for the support he received in the special election.

It is a busy legislative session in Dover, with hundreds of bills pending.

- A \$300 rebate will be issued to all Delaware taxpayers within 4-6 weeks.
- An initiative is underway to set up facilities for charging EVs
- Marijuana legislation failed, but there is a new approach with two separate bills

In response to an audience question about City sidewalk maintenance, Rep. Friel said that responsibility rests with the City, which tries to fix “the worst of the worst.” Owners are permitted to take on repairs themselves, and it is Mayor Purzycki’s view that sidewalk repair should be homeowners' responsibility. However, until the General Assembly gives the City the authority to impose repair obligations on homeowners, the City will have to bear the responsibility for sidewalk conditions.

**Captain Campos, Wilmington Police Department – Neighborhood Safety  
(Captain Campos was accompanied at the meeting by Officer Crizzo)**

Captain Campos commented on the effect of the pandemic on society. In 2022, property crimes were down 30%, and violent crime was down 15%. Traffic violations are surging, as are thefts of catalytic converters and petty theft from garages.

The Wilmington Police Department (WPD) tracks crime trends to determine where to deploy resources, so reporting suspicious activity and crime is essential.

Instagram and Twitter are becoming necessary resources for the WPD, which uses social media to keep City residents informed of public safety issues.

**Mayor Mike Purzycki**

The Mayor noted that the Wilmington Police Department is performing a great job of combatting crime. Crime overall is way down this year: Homicides are down 60%. During Covid, judges didn’t want to send defendants to jail because of the threat of covid infection: most were arrested and released on bail. Now, bail is substantially higher for violent offenders, keeping the worst offenders off the streets.

The City has seen good results with the Global Violent Intervention program (GVI), working with young people who are getting close to a life of crime and are at risk of gunshot violence. For more about the national program, see the following link: <https://everytownresearch.org/solution/violence-intervention-programs/>.

The City also is seeing good results with the Gunstat program, a multi-agency coordinated effort on gun crime. See: <https://www.wdel.com/news/wilmington->

[expands-its-gunstat-program-to-put-more-violent-offenders-away-for-longer/article\\_fff3974e-9359-11ec-b180-f3ea95735350.html](https://www.newcastlede.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2082)

Overall, the City is doing well. More and more units of apartments are constructed and occupied. People want to be here to live and work. Work-at-home trends hurt the City's wage tax collections, but new residents will offset the deficit over time.

In other developments, the Pinebox soundstage will open in a few months. A sewer agreement with NCC has just been completed. The Mayor called it “a big deal.” (For background on this issue, see: <https://www.newcastlede.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2082>). The City will have LED lighting throughout the City to light dark corners.

Property taxes will increase 7.5 percent in 2022. The Mayor called it unavoidable. The City would have to lay off 40 police officers to avoid a tax increase. “We’re not going to gut departments to balance the budget.”

On the topic of Gibraltar, the Mayor noted that goal is to make Gibraltar the best it can be. The state of the property is “shameful” and reflects poorly on all of us, he said. The Mayor has asked the General Assembly for \$1 MM to preserve the building’s exterior.

A spirited argument between the Mayor and Jeff Goddess took place about the possibility of using public bond money for preserving the property. Goddess said it would enrich the private investors who have neglected Gibraltar. The Mayor said he was trying to find a practical solution to generate moderate economic activity on the property.

#### Rob Snowberger – Gibraltar Report

Rob reported that the property does not work for development under the current zoning. He has applied to the State Historic Office to see if the plan conforms with the property’s conservation easement. Findings will be released in about three weeks, determining whether and how the project moves forward.

State Historic Office approval begins the process for the historic preservation and rezoning. Phase 1 is all the historic restoration of the exterior of the mansion, installation of a restaurant in the garage, and new residences. Phase 2 is the development of the mansion project.

Snowberger said he had nothing else to report tonight. The City has not taken any action in any respect yet. The historical application is the linchpin for doing anything else.

Snowberger's group will not commit to Phase 2 - the hotel. The current plan calls for a 76-seat restaurant and 45 parking spaces inside the Gibraltar wall. The smaller ambitions may reduce the need for new homes.

The meeting ended with a discussion about the role of the HCA in the Gibraltar project. Some residents feel that the HCA is "carrying water" for the Gibraltar project and that the HCA should not be taking sides and making the opposition's task more difficult.

Denison Hatch replied to the comments about the HCA. He pointed out that the HCA is composed of volunteers giving their time to provide information for the Highlands neighborhood. He said that the group is doing its best to provide timely updates on Gibraltar and other projects that affect the community. A number of the HCA's board members also expressed their view that the HCA is trying to maintain a neutral stance in the Gibraltar development controversy.