

HIGHLANDS COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION` (HCA)
Wilmington, Delaware
Minutes
Spring 2023 Meeting
Delaware Art Museum
May 23, 2023, 7:00 PM

PRESENT: Denison Hatch, Pres; VP Adrienne Casale; Alison Cassidy, Community Outreach VP, Lindsey DiSabatino, Neighborhood Events VP; Margaret Sears Lindley, Secretary; John Novaczyk, Treasurer. EXCUSED: John Gavenois, VP; Zoning & Land Use Treasurer Marlene Santacecilia, 8th District Neighborhood Planning Council Representative

AGENDA

Denison Hatch, HCA President

Denison called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and welcomed everyone.

Treasurer's Report – John Novaczyk

John reported that last September (2022) bank balances checking account was \$11,724, savings account was 14,873 for a total of \$26,597. Since then, the HCA had three community events – a record: The 5K Race for the Friends of Wilmington Parks, the Easter Egg Hunt. Our overall costs for those events exceeded revenue by \$1,472.00, which was covered by a surplus from last year. {\$1472}. We also had some website costs. Thus, in May 2023 the HCA unrestricted funds were \$23,309.00, The HCA is holding an additional \$75K from a specialized grant to pay for improved streetlights on N Grant Avenue and Field Road, which will be paid to Delmarva.

Report on Criminal Activity/Community policing (WPD Captain Matthew M Rosaio)

Captain Rosaio introduced himself and expressed his appreciation for taking on the role previously held by now-Wilmington-police-chief Campos. Captain Rosaio noted that under Chief Campos, the Wilmington Police employ a community policing model that emphasizes community engagement. He introduced the three

officers working as a team assigned to everything west of I-95: Officers Flores, Harmon, and Pratt.

Crime is low in the Highlands. The main crime issue is package theft by opportunists. The second issue is the theft of Hyundais and Kias exploiting a security flaw in cars manufactured between 2011-2021 that allow easy access to the ignition using a USB cable. To help address the problem, the Wilmington Police Dept has partnered with Hyundai and Kia to provide free wheel locks for eligible cars. Captain Rosaio noted that overall, theft of unattended cars has calmed down. But he reminded the audience that opportunists will always be around, and we need to be attentive and report suspicious activity.

Captain Rosaio commented on the February attempted burglaries on Red Oak Road. Fortunately, a homeowner's Ring camera captured film of a suspect who the police were able to link to the burglary and a few others in the area. This led to a successful arrest and the burglaries in the area have since stopped. He also noted an incident involving a Dodge Charger whose occupants, the police believe, are individuals who have been apprehended based on a description of the car. Finally, because of Ring camera footage, police were able to track down and arrest in Pennsylvania a suspect in a jewelry theft on N Bancroft Street.

Finally, Captain Rosaio reminded the audience that the Wilmington police have an information system called Nixle that sends out press releases via texts or emails about arrests and other important community information. Anyone can sign up. Go to <https://nixle.com/city/de/wilmington/>.

Highlands Neighborhood Events Report – Lindsay diSabatino

Since our last meeting, we've held four neighborhood events, 1) the Halloween Parade (Oct 30), a 5K race that raised \$13,500 for Friends of the Wilmington Parks with over 300 participants and 14 sponsors, the Spring Easter Egg Hunt for 350 children at the Delaware Art Museum, and finally, an "Art of the Cocktail" event with over 280 Highlands neighbors participating that raised \$50K for the museum.

Highlands Neighborhood Spring Food Drive Report – Allison

We hold two Highlands Neighborhood food drives a year benefiting the Delaware Food Bank because the need is so great. The Thanksgiving drive was very successful, but the Spring drive that took place just before the Memorial Day weekend was a bit light. We took in a total \$1255 in donations and 195 lbs. of

food. As ever, it is not too late to donate to the food bank at www.fbd.org/get-involved/donate-money. The need is especially high during the summer when children are out of school.

Mayor Mike Purzycki Report

Mayor Purzycki started with a comment about the Wilmington Police Dept. With Captain Campo's promotion to Police Chief, the department promoted several younger lieutenants to leadership positions as Captains. This has led to noticeable positive changes in the department with personnel who are genuinely excited about their roles. The Mayor said that he thinks this is the best police department the City has ever had.

The Mayor addressed the issue of Gibraltar, noting that various groups have tried for over twenty years to find a solution for the property. He noted that as Mayor his role is to be a problem solver and to fix what he can to make the city better. So, he announced that he has decided that the City of Wilmington should buy the property. The city will pay the owner \$600,000. The Mayor will ask the City Council to vacate 16th Street and transfer two building lots to the owner. The Mayor acknowledged that this decision will not please everyone, but he thinks it is the best solution.

Delaware General Assembly - Representative Krista Griffith

Krista introduced herself and reminded the audience that she became the Highland's State representative back in November as part of redistricting. She invited everyone to note her phone number: 302-528-1779. Krista has been part of the Joint Finance Committee working on the state budget next year which is approximately \$5 B. Some budget initiatives include increasing payments for personal care attendants who care for loved ones at home. Another concerns traffic safety: Delaware has experienced a high number of road fatalities, so you will see stepped up traffic enforcement. Krista has been working on the Delaware Privacy Protection Act that allows a consumer to correct information or ultimately ask companies to take down information about themselves. She also serves as CEO of the Children's Advocacy Center, so she is involved in legislation involving child abuse and domestic violence. This initiative extends to animal abuse also, as there is a great link between these three. Finally, she is working on an electric fleet bill for the state that would ensure that State vehicles that do not require fuel/high power (such as police cars and snowplows) are electric.

Legislative Report – James Berry, Legislative Assistant to State Senator Sarah McBride.

James reported several initiatives:

- Streetlights on N Grant and Field Roads will be updated later this year. Funds for the project (\$75K) have been transferred to the HCA to hold until the work begins. The State wants to be sure that the lights are the right temperature: some new lights installed in other neighborhoods have been too bright.
- Bancroft Mill Bridge Project. The State hopes the work can begin in the fall (though some conflicting information states that it won't commence until 2024). Federal wildlife protections prevent work from taking place between April to July of each year, so the work must be done around the gap.
- Senate Bill 9 would create a process for health officials to identify and remediate homes that contain exposed lead paint, which includes screening every residential rental property in Delaware. The bill would also establish a state-funding mechanism to cover the cost of those repairs.
- Senate Bill 256. Abuse of Power Prevention Act would hold Delaware's public servants more accountable for misconduct.
- Professional Regulation: A bill hopes to codify a practice in place in many other states that would speed up the process for professionals to obtain their Delaware professional licenses. This is especially important given the job shortages among electricians, nurses, and doctors in Delaware.
- A bill to mandate that all new homes and structures be EV capable and would require new apartment and condominium complexes provide EV charging stations in 5% of new apartment parking spaces and 10% in condominiums by 2025.
- A bill to extend funding for auto insurance for youth who are in or are aging out of foster care so that they can obtain drivers licenses.

8th District Council Member - Nathan Field

Nathan reported that many constituents are concerned about the challenge of absorbing the new apartment complexes at The Falls with the existing road

infrastructure. 345 new households and 700 new people have been added. Nathan has been working with Delmarva and Public Works to see if a new walking path can be added from the Swinging Bridge to Three Mill Road.

Many people have asked who is responsible for sidewalks. The answer is the City is responsible for fixing sidewalks. It's an easy process to request repairs. Call Delaware 311, click public works and report a sidewalk issue. Nathan reminded everyone that he sends out a newsletter that goes out every two-three months. To sign up contact Nrfield@wilmingtonde.gov

Council Member At-Large - James Spadola

Council member Spadola reminded everyone that the annual Memorial Day Parade will take place on May 30 that starts at 6 PM at Delaware and Woodlawn Avenues.

The City Council recently passed a unanimous resolution backing proposed Senate Bill 67, sponsored by State Senator Sara McBride, that would upgrade punishment for official misconduct by public officials.

Council Member At-Large – Latisha L. Bracy

Councilperson Bracy introduced herself. She became a member of the City Council in December 2022 to fill an At-Large vacancy left by former Councilwoman Loretta Walsh. Bracy has a history of public service. She served as Outreach/Projects Director for U.S. Senator Chris Coons and worked on campaign and offices for U.S. Representative Lisa Blunt Rochester, U.S. Senators Carper, and Biden. She also ran her own consulting company working with nonprofits and small businesses. She passed out her business card and invited constituents to get in touch with her at (302) 576-2140. libracy@wilmingtonde.gov

Joseph E. Johnson, Jr. Elementary School (formerly Highlands Elementary) – Dr. Chrishaun Fitzgerald, Ed.D. and Nicole Romano, Ed.D., PHR

Jarred Phillips introduced Dr. Chrishaun Fitzgerald, the Principal of the Joseph E. Johnson, Jr. Elementary School, formerly the Highlands Elementary School. Jarred pointed out that even though many Highlands residents don't send their children to the school, the school is in our neighborhood, and we should feel an obligation to help. Past efforts have involved adopting families for Christmas, but the opportunities to help go far beyond that.

Dr. Fitzgerald told the audience about a long-established mentoring program (30 years) at the school. About 60 mentors regularly come to the school (typically 30 minutes once a week in the mornings on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, October through May, for tutoring in reading, math, etc.). Mentors are matched with students and stay with the students each year as they progress through their education. Interested Highlands residents can find out more about the program

Wilmington and Alapocas Run state parks Superintendent – Patrick Thompson

Pat Thompson, the new superintendent of the Rockford Park and Alapocas Run State Park introduced himself to the group. He has been with the park system for nineteen years, most recently in Auburn Valley State Park. He emphasized that his primary concern is for the safety of all park users. He expressed his interest in getting to know the community and invited everyone to reach out to him with any questions or concerns. Pat's email is Patrick.Thompson@delaware.gov.

Bancroft Pedestrian Bridge Report – Gary Linarducci

Gary spoke with Brooks Cahall of DNREC for an update on the bridge repair timetable. Unfortunately, it appears that the repair work will not start until August of 2024, and they will finish in April 2025. Gary said that he has pushed back several times hoping to convince the State to start work in August 2023. Several issues have yet to be resolved: the new plan is to have bridge railings that are nine feet high. Gary felt that higher bridge railings would ruin the view of the river (the current railings are about four feet high). Also, the trees that were knocked down and settled along the riverbanks still haven't been removed. So far, the State doesn't have a plan for their removal. Gary has spoken to Sarah McBride to get a plan developed quickly. Gary urged everyone to contact their elected officials to put pressure on them to keep the bridge view the same as it has been for 100 years.

Incyte Expansion Plan - Blair Althouse

Blair spoke about his opposition to the Incyte variance request that would allow it to build a 400,000 square foot expansion and add 1050 to 1200 employees to the site currently occupied by Friends Lower School. Last week, the Board of Adjustment unanimously voted down Incyte's variance request. This is likely not

the end of Incyte's pursuit of the variance. Blair and his wife, Cindy, have brochures that explain what they believe is the negative impact of the project plan, especially increased traffic. Blair said that they will stay after the meeting to provide information to anyone who is interested.

Wilmington Neighborhood Conservancy Land Bank (WNCLB)– Bud Freel

Former 8th District City Council Member and Delaware Representative, Bud Freel, has long been involved in efforts to create city legislation to assess civil fines for owners of neglected rental and vacant properties. While those efforts have not yet been formally codified in the City, Bud reported on an organization that is making big strides in acquiring, rehabilitating, and selling abandoned properties: the Wilmington Neighborhood Conservancy Land Bank.

The mission of the Wilmington Neighborhood Conservancy Land Bank (WNCLB) is to return vacant, dilapidated, abandoned, and delinquent properties back to productive use, while strengthening and revitalizing our neighborhoods and inspiring economic development. Bud explained that we have over 1500 vacant properties in the city of Wilmington. Many of them are in economically challenged areas. Obviously, Bud noted, we aren't going to be acquiring properties in the Highlands, but as the Mayor noted, we are part of one community – we're part of a bigger city.

Bud invited anyone who is interested in acquiring a property to look at the list of available properties and to submit an application.

<https://wilmingtonlandbank.org/about/>

Denison adjourned the meeting at 8:23 PM