

Highlands Community Association  
Meeting

October 18, 2023

7:00 PM

Denison Hatch, Pres; John Gavenois, VP; John Nowaczyk, Treasurer; Margaret Sears Lindley, Secretary; Lindsey DiSabatino, Neighborhood Events VP; Adrienne Casale Zoning & Land Use VP; Allison Cassidy, Community Outreach VP; Marlene Santacecilia, 8th District Neighborhood Planning Council, Rep Jarred Phillips, Johnson School HCA Rep,

**HCA President, Denison Hatch**, opened the meeting thanking and acknowledging the role and efforts of the volunteer HCA Executive Committee members (listed above).

Further, he announced the creation of a nominating committee, chaired by John Gavenois to present a slate of officers to be voted on at the Spring HCA meeting. Anyone interested in serving or recommending anyone to serve on the HCA Executive Committee, is urged to log on to the HCA website or to contact John Gavenois directly at johngav@comcast.net. The HCA can use volunteers who want to help maintain and refresh the HCA website, and revise the HCA Bylaws, among other tasks.

**Treasurer's Report – John Nowaczyk**

John reported that last May, the HCA had a total of \$98,000, including \$75,000 for a streetlight project that came from the State legislature. Most HCA revenue-producing events take place between the Fall and Spring meetings, so apart from the Halloween parade (taking place Sunday, October 22, 2023), the HCA expenses are nominal, including website and email costs, annual filing fees and rental fees for our meetings. Because the HCA has a healthy balance, the HCA has not had to ask for membership dues for over a decade. Please see the attached Treasurer's report for a full summary of the HCA's account.

**Highlands Events - Lindsey DeSabatino**

Lindsey announced that 180 children have registered for the Highlands 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Halloween Parade that takes place on Sunday, October 22, 2023, from 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm at the Delaware Art Museum. The event has been a huge undertaking with over 70 volunteers helping with the procurement of funds, donations and setting up the parade, which includes goodies bags, art projects, and face painting. Awards will be given for several categories of outstanding costumes. Lindsey urged everyone to come out for the event to support the children.

## **Allison Cassidy – Highlands Food Drive – November 2-5, 2023**

Allison announced that the annual Highlands Food Drive to benefit the Delaware Food Bank will take place a little earlier this year on Nov 2-5. She passed out a flyer with the details that included the most-needed items (Thanksgiving holiday food items, e.g., instant mashed potatoes, pie fillings and crust, canned vegetables, frozen turkeys), as well as the other standing food bank needs. Allison noted the ways to support the food drive: 1) write a check, 2) donate food and other basic items, such as paper towels.

Donations: **Please place items on the front porch at 1420 Hamilton Street.** Contact Allison Cassidy at [302-545-7865](tel:302-545-7865)/[acassidy21@gmail.com](mailto:acassidy21@gmail.com) to make arrangements for pickup. Checks can be made out to Food Bank of Delaware and placed in her mailbox. You can also VENMO @allison-Cassidy-6.

## **Johnson Elementary School Opportunities**

Jarred Phillips, a Highlands resident, spoke about opportunities for residents to help the local Johnson Elementary school. The children who attend this school face many challenges. Over 85% of them are below the poverty line and 20% are unhoused, which means that they have no permanent home. Nevertheless, the school staff do an amazing job supporting the students.

Recently, for the first time, the school has formed a PTA with three members. Anyone who has had experience with PTAs knows how invaluable they are in helping support the staff and teachers. However, compared to other schools, this PTA is severely underfunded and needs resources, both money and donations of supplies and equipment. Recently, Jarred hosted a tour of the school for Wilmington City Councilmen James Spadola and Nathan Field, who both contributed \$1K to the PTA.

Jarred appealed to Highlands residents to think about becoming involved with the elementary school, either as a mentor (mentors are matched with the students and meet once a week for thirty minutes), a donor (the school needs supplies and money) or through in-kind donations (think about giving furniture and clothing items to the school). Jarred was successful in making arrangements with Amazon, which has agreed to fulfill the wish lists of each teacher at the elementary school.

If you want to help, you can write a check to **Johnson Elementary PTA** and drop it off at **Johnson Elementary 2100 Gilpin Ave, Wilmington, DE 19806 ATTN: Nicole Romano.**

Anyone interested in the **Mentorship Program** can reach out to **Helene Gladney** at [helene.gladney@redclay.k12.de.us](mailto:helene.gladney@redclay.k12.de.us) for more information and/or to volunteer to be a Mentor.

As he did last year, Jarred is organizing a drive to help Johnson Elementary school families at Christmas. Last year, his group supported sixteen families and they hope to do more this year.

### **Community Safety Report – WPD Captain Matthew M. Rosaio**

Wilmington Police Captain Rosaio began by acknowledging his Highlands community engagement officers who patrol the Highlands community, do undercover patrols, and get to know residents. He also introduced the department's police dog, Barry, and his handler, M/Sgt Scott Banks.

Captain Rosaio reported that car theft, attempted car theft and car break-ins are the most prevalent crime in the City, up 46% this year, though the majority of those involve Kias and Hyundais across the state and the region. "Opportunists" are always looking for a chance to steal a running car (don't leave your vehicle running) or check door handles at night for open vehicles that may have change, keys, or weapons. Most criminal activity takes place between midnight and 6 am while residents are asleep. Captain Rosaio has formed an undercover task force to patrol the Highlands during this time period in an effort to spot and identify opportunists who are roaming the streets.

To help prevent auto theft, Capt. Rosaio asked the residents to do the following:

- Hide or secure valuables, bags, and computers.
- Remove legal firearms from autos overnight.
- Remove key fobs and extra keys.  
Park in well-lit areas and if possible, park near a Ring camera or other surveillance device.
- Report suspicious activity: Call (302) 654-5151.
- Amazon sells glass-break alarms to deter subjects who try to break rear-windows to gain access to cars.

Capt. Rosaio noted that Ring cameras are especially helpful to the police and urged residents to phone in reports of suspicious activity. Cpt Rosaio said that many people hesitate to call in reports because the residents "don't want to bother" the police. He said the police welcome these reports because they help track activity that leads to arrests. He also noted that neighborhood efforts, such as Neighborhood Watch groups, help the police. A recent initiative by Maria Higgins in the Riddle Ave area aims at creating an organizational system for residents to remain vigilant during the critical midnight-6 am hours.

The "Tik-Tok" wave continues to plague Kia and Hyundai owners who have not upgraded their cars' software. This Tik-Tok-popularized crime involves a software glitch that allows potential car thieves who break in a window (usually the back one) to use a screwdriver to start the ignition and steal the car. To prevent theft, the police have recommended Kia and Hyundai owners use the old-fashioned steering wheel locking batons as a deterrent, and ultimately to update their cars with newer software.

Capt. Rosaio was asked about thefts from local pharmacies and groceries. Capt. Rosaio said that the police have a good working arrangement with CVS and Walgreens staff to identify repeat offenders who shoplift from the stores. This has helped cut down on shoplifting and is a strategy the police will continue to use.

Capt. Rosaio noted that the Highlands community is the among most engaged group of City residents. Most community association meetings are attended by very few people, while the HCA turnout is much larger, and participation is very attentive. As ever, please sign up to receive emails about on-going police activity and alerts issued by the police public information officer at NIXLE at <https://nixle.com/City/de/wilmington/>

### **Neighborhood Watch Opportunities – Maria Higgins and Cheryl Drake**

Cheryl Drake and Maria Higgins shared a Neighborhood Watch initiative they have started in the Riddle Avenue area of the Highlands, in conjunction with local law enforcement, to reduce crime. They said that they are responding to an increase in stolen packages from porches, smashed car windows and thieves checking car doors as well as house doors in the neighborhood. Also, pets have been stolen from nearby neighborhood yards.

At an initial meeting with Capt. Rosaio, and WPD community engagement officers, the group benchmarked crime in their area and will monitor the impact of the Watch program. The group has ordered yard signs to be installed on Riddle Avenue. They are preparing a mission statement, goals and objective to be ready for review at a second meeting.

The second meeting of this Neighborhood Watch group will take place on October 30, 2023, at 7 pm at Finnegan’s Pub. Anyone who is interested in this group and possibly expanding the effort in the Highlands is welcome at the meeting. For more information, residents are invited to join the WhatsApp Group, Neighborhood Watch,” to stay informed.

### **Mayor’s Report – Wilmington Mayor Mike Purzycki**

Mayor Purzycki opened his remarks with praise for the Wilmington Police Department, which he noted “is outstanding in every way.” The City’s homicide rate is down 62%. Overall crime is down 26%. This improvement came about because Wilmington’s police force is taking guns off the streets and is showing great restraint in managing crime. Of all shooting incidents (over 650), only six have directly involved police officers. He also noted that the WPD makes outstanding use of technology and forensics in its police work. For example, earlier, WPD Captain Rosaio mentioned the role that gun casings play in solving crime. Individual casings can be traced so that police can map out the use of guns in incidents throughout the City and region, which helps them identify suspects and make faster arrests.

Mayor Purzycki noted how lucky Wilmington is to have the Delaware Art Museum (DAM) as a resource. Cultural institutions like the DAM make City living so great. He urged residents to support Wilmington’s nonprofit organizations that continue to operate under economic stress.

The Mayor spoke about the challenges facing at the City as it finds alternatives to the traditional tax revenue that was once generated by workers' wage taxes. Now, over 31% of Wilmington's work force is working from home, a trend that is not likely to be reversed. The City has to adapt. Fortunately, people are moving into the City to enjoy the proximity to good restaurants, entertainment and a fresh supply of attractive apartment buildings. These residents are making up some of the wage tax deficit.

On another matter, the City is considering changing the rules around residency requirements for Wilmington City employees. The City is finding it difficult to fill some positions because of this residency requirement, which does not apply to other positions in State government.

Finally, the Mayor talked about the cleanup efforts at Gibraltar, which have already yielded results – clearing much-overgrown marble steps, cleaning up the garden and investigating flat-roof leaks that may be patched instead of replacing the slate roof. The garages are in terrible shape, but they contain subway tile and bricks on the floors, which, once restored, will be beautiful.

Several residents brought up the issue of the City's Gibraltar purchase and the perceived neglect of the owners and various agencies in allowing the property to decline to its current state. A group of nearby homeowners still strenuously object to allowing the owners to sell two properties as part of the City's agreement to purchase Gibraltar. They also object to the City's proposed vacation of 16<sup>th</sup> street.

Mayor Purzycki said that the property has been neglected for twenty-five year and that one can pick various points along the way to assign blame for the problem. "Someone sold the owners the property for a song years ago" The fact is that the owners own the property. The City wants to move forward with a plan to transfer the ownership to the City and rehabilitate and preserve Gibraltar for a yet-to-be-determined use. Unless the City purchases Gibraltar and vacates the 16<sup>th</sup> Street right-of-way, no change is possible.

### **City Councilman Nathan Field – Report**

Councilman Field started his report by echoing Mayor Purzycki's comments about the importance of the Delaware Art Museum and various Wilmington nonprofits that depend on ticket sales for financial support. He urged residents to rally behind them by attending events. To help the Museum, Field has obtained two billboards, one near Incyte and another on Delaware Ave near Trolley Square promoting the Rossettis exhibition that will be open for three months.

On November 4, Rockford Tower will once again be lit for the holiday season. This year, an expanded celebration will take place in Rockford Park, from 2pm-5 pm before the lighting ceremony. A \$10 cover charge will benefit the park system. The event includes music, vendors, food trucks and Rockford Tower will be open to the public for several hours.

Councilman Field, noting Jarred Phillips appeal to the HCA, urged the Highlands community to support the Johnson Elementary School. He and Councilman Spadola toured the school and

immediately pledged financial support for the PTA. He hopes residents will chip in and support the school's newly formed PTA.

Field reiterated that his goal is to keep everyone informed about developments in the 8<sup>th</sup> District. His newsletter goes out every two months. Everyone is invited to subscribe <https://www.nathanfield2020.com/updates>

### **Councilman James Spadola – Report**

Building on prior comments about Wilmington's nonprofit organizations, Councilman Spadola noted that each council members receives \$33K in discretionary funds to give to worthy projects. He urged residents to contact him if they know of good ideas that need financial support.

For those who own or are considering owning an EV, new legislation is moving forward that will regulate how residents who do not have private garages will be able to charge their EVs on the street.

Legislative Report – Rep Krista Griffith

Legislative Report – Senator Sarah McBride

Both legislators were unable to attend the HCA meeting. Their reports are included with the minutes as attachments.

Submitted by Margaret Sears Lindley