HIGHLANDS COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION (HCA)
Wilmington, Delaware
Minutes
Spring 2024 Meeting
Delaware Art Museum
May 29, 2024, 7:00 PM

PRESENT: Denison Hatch, Pres; VP Adrienne Casale; Alison Cassidy, Community Outreach VP; Lindsey DiSabatino, Neighborhood Events VP; John Gavenois, VP; Zoning & Land Use; Margaret Sears Lindley, Secretary; John Nowaczyk; Treasurer; Jarred Phillips, Joseph E. Johnson, Jr. School Representative; 8th DNPC Rep, Marlene Santacecilia.

AGENDA

Denison Hatch, HCA President

Denison opened the meeting by welcoming everyone. He asked for a vote to confirm the election of Lindsay Abrahams as the HCA Recording Secretary beginning with the Fall 2024 meeting, to replace Margaret Sears Lindley who is stepping down from the role after six years. The members present at the meeting confirmed Lindsay's election by voice vote.

Treasurer's Report – John Nowaczyk

John reported that unrestricted cash declined $1,563, with net outflows of $1035 from events and donations and $530 in HCA website and email costs, leaving the HCA net unrestricted cash balances of $21,108. The HCA has a total cash balance of $85,595. This includes a balance of $64,487 of state transportation funds remaining unused from a recent street light project, which will be provided to DNREC / Dept of Parks for removal of a pipe from the Brandywine River.

Community Events – Lindsey DiSabatino

Lindsey reported a highly successful Spring Easter Egg Hunt at the Delaware Art Museum, with 300 attendees, including 200 children. Volunteers stuffed and

distributed over 10,000 Easter Eggs, all of which were found. The event included face painting and a DJ.

Semi-Annual Food Drive – Alison Cassidy

Alison thanked everyone who participated in the recent clothing and toy drive for the J.E. Johnson, Jr. School. Alison transported four-five carloads of donations to the school that were graciously accepted with gratitude. Alison noted that she hopes to conduct a similar drive this coming fall. Many of the school attendees wear the same clothes all year around and the donations help them tremendously. The semi-annual food drive starts tomorrow (May 30). This food drive also will benefit the Joseph E. Johnson, Jr. School. For those who would prefer to give a check or cash, the school has a separate 501(c)(3) for donations. The school is looking for any kind of canned goods, juice boxes, paper products and pet food. Don't forget to consider donating any toys, puzzles or games you might have at home that you are no longer using.

Joseph E. Johnson, Jr. School Report – Jarred Phillips

Many Highlands residents have contributed to our efforts to support the Joseph E. Johnson, Jr. School. The clothing, toy and food drives are one example. Last holiday season, residents helped 20 families and 138 students, hold a holiday party at the school and helped enroll the school in several important programs that have helped students. These include Operation Warm, which provides winter coats for students, as well as Americorps VISTA. Another is a tutoring program with students from Howard High School. El Diablo, the Trolley Square restaurant, catered lunch for the entire staff for Teacher-Appreciation Week.

Recently, we have focused on a new project, the playground at the school. The goal is to raise $150K through every public dollar we can find (grants, community partners), as well as direct contributions from corporations and individuals. We will have a fall fundraiser, by which time we plan to have the entire project mapped out. If our fundraising goals are met through next year, we would install the new playground next summer in time for the 2025-26 school year.

Jarred showed slides of the proposed playground along with a timeline.

DE State Parks Brandywine Bridge Update – Brooks Cahall

Brooks told the HCA that bids are out for the Bancroft Bridge/Alapocas Pedestrian Project with the aim of selecting a contractor in July. Meanwhile, Park officials have been working with FEMA, which is paying for 80% of the project. The new proposed bridge required working through a series of adverse impact studies to come to an agreement with the community about the bridge design (honoring the history of the area and the existing bridge), documentation review with DNREC, FEMA and the State Historic Preservation Office and the "obligation" process—obtaining temporary construction easements from the Brandywine Condos and Carriage House residents. As part of the project, an old water process pipe, which was used in the old mill facility, became dislodged in the river at the time the bridge was damaged. The pipe must be removed, so approvals and permission to allow contractors to reach the pipe were needed. Incidentally, our legislators (Griffith, McBride and Field) and the HCA, through leftover streetlight funds, helped provide the monies for the pipe removal.

Work on the bridge will commence beginning in September. The bridge is being prefabricated, but preparations such as concrete/sidewalk connections and bridge decking will be put in place before the bridge arrives for installation. Park officials anticipate that the support work will be in place by April 1 though until a bridge fabricator is selected, we won't have a firm date for the bridge installation itself.

DuPont Experimental Station Site Leader – Vere Archibald

Vere and his colleague, Jason Gonzalez, came to introduce themselves to let the HCA and Highlands residents know that they can reach out to the Experimental Station when they have questions or concerns about air quality or noise. Vere told the group that the Experimental Station is an anchor partner with MidAtlantic Clean Hydrogen Hub, Inc., a network of producers, users, distributors and stakeholders within the hydrogen ecosystem. This initiative has as its goal the burning of hydrogen instead of natural gas. DuPont is in the very early stages of exploring this possibility. Burning hydrogen is expensive, but with the involvement of the hub network, and the University of Delaware, Delaware is taking an active leading position in the clean energy future. Vere Archibald's email address is vere.archibald@usa.dupont.com

Delaware State Senator – Sarah McBride

Sarah gave the HCA an update on several legislative issues that she has been working on, but first gave a shoutout to Nathan Field for his collaborative efforts to create the trail connecting Mill Road to the Brandywine Park at a point closer to downtown. With the restoration of the Brandywine Bridge by summer 2025, we will at last close the pedestrian loop for the Wilmington Park system.

Legislatively, Sarah helped pass the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act which represents the largest expansion of the social safety net in modern State history. The legislature passed the most significant gun safety package in State history, including an assault weapons ban and a requirement for a permit to purchase a handgun. Sarah led an effort to establish a program to combat lead poisoning in our homes. She also helped expand Medicaid coverage to roughly one in three Delawareans. Last year, Sarah worked with Attorney General Kathy Jennings to pass a historic package of anti-corruption public trust legislation in Delaware that makes Delaware's anti-corruption laws the best in the United States.

Sarah reminded everyone that she is running to succeed Lisa Blunt Rochester in the US House of Representatives as Delaware's Member of Congress-at-Large.

Delaware State Representative - Krista Griffith

Krista, as a member of the Joint Finance Committee, has been helping to write the State budget that will be passed at the end of this legislative session in June. The budget covers everything from safe roads to school funding, mental health advocacy and support for nursing homes. Krista was behind the passage of the data privacy law that was passed last year. It gives Delaware consumers access to information that companies have about them and allows consumers to ask that it be deleted or corrected. Krista also supported a Delaware House provision (now headed for Senate approval) that makes it a crime to send sexually explicit deep fake AI images. She also is a chief supporter of the Family Justice Center initiative that establishes a center in each county where victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, and elder abuse will have access to resources to help them obtain safety and security.

Wilmington 8th District Council Member – Nathan Field

Nathan reminded everyone of the 157th annual City of Wilmington Memorial Day Parade. The parade ends at the newly renovated and illuminated Soldiers and Sailors monument.

Nathan noted that the Mill Road trail path is well underway thanks to the team effort of legislators and the Mayor, who came together to make it happen.

Traffic issues, especially speeding and running stop signs, remain the biggest issues in the Highlands. The police have some strategies to address the problem.

Nathan noted that we're six months away from the Rockford Tower winter lights kick off, but it's not too early to sign up to be a volunteer for the event. Last year, it drew 700 people.

Wilmington Council Member at-Large - James Spadola

James noted that some of the funding for the proposed Johnston Elementary School playground will be committed from his ARPA funds, approximately $30K that each Council member receives annually to distribute to nonprofits around the City. He invited Highlands residents to reach out if they know about a nonprofit doing great work or a project that deserves support.

James mentioned that the Mayor's office is working on a streamlined residential permit process that will reduce parking ticket fines. He would like to see a parking study done, much like the one that was undertaken in Rehoboth.

He ended with a pitch for the Delaware Art Museum's Thursday night happy hours, which are well-attended. His band, Skinner and Spadola, will be featured on Thursday August 1st. He said he thinks they are pretty good.

Wilmington Council Member at-Large – Latisha Bracy

Latisha introduced herself and that she too is happy to support the Joseph E. Johnson, Jr. Elementary School and reiterated that residents should feel free reach out to her if they know of a project that needs support.

Latisha mentioned the recent passage of the Wilmington City Budget last October that provides for an infusion of money into the Mayor's Office of Economic Development, specifically to support small minority owned businesses. She said that she strongly feels that minorities in the City should have access not only to housing but to small business and entrepreneurship support.

Wilmington Police Department Captain Matthew Rosaio

Capt. Rosaio expressed his appreciation for the Highlands Community meeting noting that he is responsible for over twenty different civic associations throughout the west side of Wilmington. These community associations are among the police department's greatest assets. The Highlands police community engagement unit officer, Master Corporal Flores, was in attendance.

The Wilmington Police Department is working closely with residents who own RING cameras and has created a website so that residents can push anything to the police department that they deem noteworthy. The website is https://www.wilmingtonde.gov/government/public-safety/wilmington-police-department/submit-video-and-photo-evidence. This footage helps the department assess threats that may exist and helps the department deploy resources more effectively.

The department tracks and measures trends. Comparatively, over the past seven years that the department has been tracking, crime is down 19% everywhere west of I-95. That's a testament to the great work we are doing together. The resident-provided information, the technology, the surveillance, and the camera footage all help.

The most persistent crimes in the Highlands are crimes of opportunity – checking door handles, finding keys in cars, et cetera. Capt. Rosaio reminded everyone as he does at each HCA meeting to lock your house and car doors at night. Don't leave a spare key in your car. Don't leave valuables in your cars.

Capt. Rosaio stressed the importance of calling 911 to report suspicious activity or to ask an officer to check ring camera footage. The police department uses ShotSpotter technology throughout the City, an acoustic gunshot detection technology, which is valuable for deploying rapid response to gunfire incidents. License plate readers also help with crime.

A new initiative that Chief Campos has proven to be effective is the Partners in Care program. This puts together civilian mental health clinicians with trained officers to ride together throughout the City. Mental health conditions affect everybody and exacerbate the problems of homelessness and drug addiction that are plaguing the world. With the help of civilians, police officers are often able to puzzle out mental health conditions first and resolve them.

Noting that Mayor Purzycki will be leaving office after his term expires later this year, Capt. Rosaio thanked the Mayor for everything he has done for the City of Wilmington.

Finally, Capt. Rosaio quoted his grandmothers' favorite saying from St. Francis DeSales: "Be who you are and be that well." He added, "The police profession has its challenges. I signed up to do this job to serve others because that's where I want to be and that's who we are on this job. We need people with core values, and we need those who want to step away from their families to serve yours."

Wilmington Mayor Honorable Michael S. Purzycki

Mayor Purzycki noted that the arrival of Incyte to the new location in Wilmington, bringing 500-600 jobs, is one of the best pieces of news the City has had in a long time. Governor Carney has been working right alongside the Mayor to make this happen. Financially, it adds well over a million dollars annually to the City budget.

At the same time, the Longwood Foundation has the aspiration to create an educational hub for college students downtown. The vision includes bringing a Delaware State nursing program and the Widener Law School downtown to create an aggregate college population in the City. This development should energize the section of downtown that was left by MBNA.

Among other improvements, the Rodney Reservoir, a "weed pile" for years, is being demolished and the City will build a beautiful park in its place. Rodney Square is almost finished and is looking great. The ongoing construction of apartment buildings is bringing people to the City, which adds additional wage tax revenue. The City also has been building affordable housing units.

All in all, as Capt. Rosaio noted, we've had a 19% reduction in crime, the lowest we've had in years. Homicides are down 30%. The Wilmington police have been doing a terrific job.

Democratic mayoral primary candidate – Velda Jones-Potter
Democratic major primary candidate – Gov. John Carney

Both candidates spoke and give their respective views on the future of the City and made their case for their candidacy.

Respectfully Submitted,

Margaret Sears Lindley, Secretary HCA