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

PRESENT: Denison Hatch, Pres; VP John Gavenonis; Lindsey DiSabatino, Neighborhood Events; John Nowaczyk, Treasurer; Adrienne Casale, Real Estate; Jarred Phillips, Joseph E. Johnson School Representative; Lindsay Abrahams, Secretary

AGENDA

Denison Hatch, HCA President

Denison opened the meeting at 7:04 pm and welcomed everyone.

John Nowaczyk, Treasurer

John reported that since May 2024, the HCA received a $300 donation from Council Person Bracy and had expenses for the Halloween parade in the amount of $135.99 after donations, as well as website tax & compliance and museum rental costs of about $540. The current bank account funds are $85,356, however, John noted that the check for the pipe removal was written approximately one month ago. After the check clears, there will be $20,521 left in the HCA account. Please refer to the Treasurer's Report available on the HCA website for a full summary of the HCA's account.

Lindsey DiSabatino, Neighborhood Events

Lindsey introduced herself to the community and her role planning the HCA events including the Halloween parade and egg hunt. The Halloween parade took place last Saturday and gathered an crowd of about 200 people of all ages, many in costume, with special guests Wendy Hatch painting faces as well as James Spadola and Latisha Bracy to judge the costume parade.

Meghan Sullivan and Sue DiNardo, Food Bank of Delaware

Sue introduced herself as the Community Development Manager for the Food Bank of Delaware joining the HCA meeting to share information about the food bank. While many think of the food bank as "food in and food out" there is more to know about the organization. Food insecurity was discussed as the inability to put nutritious food on the table or not having access to nutritious food. Food comes in to their two locations from community food drives, donations from big retailers such as Walmart and supermarkets, the USDA, and the Food Bank of Delaware purchases food. In addition to programs reaching seniors, children in schools, as well as others, the food bank attempts to reach people with challenges getting to the food bank sites through a program with Amazon.

Meghan spoke about the topic of Food For Tomorrow and their work in creative ways such as a culinary training program leading to student placement in paid internships within the hospitality industry in Delaware, often leading to hiring. Additionally, they have a similarly modeled kitchen school for adults with disabilities designed in collaboration with Delaware Restaurant Association and others. The food bank sites are also massive warehouse facilities with a need to get food in and get food out within two weeks. This allows them to be able to use their facilities to support a warehousing and logistics training program.
Sue followed up by noting the HCA upcoming food drive and their gratitude, as well as an invitation to come to the Food Bank of Delaware site(s) for a tour or reach out for volunteering opportunities at the food bank sites or on committees.

Jarred Phillips, Joseph E. Johnson Elementary School Representative

Jarred provided several updates regarding Johnson Elementary School beginning with a new principal, Maribeth Courtney. Maribeth has met with neighbors on Gilpin Avenue regarding concerns about traffic flow and they made some changes. Jarred asked for HCA community members to reach out to him or Maribeth with similar concerns as she has been open to such inquiries. Information regarding the Adopt-A-Family, Operation Warm, and the AmeriCorps VISTA partnership was shared. The community mentorship program is currently on pause while the school transitions to the new principal and implementing changes. Jarred shared a video put together by AmeriCorps VISTA featuring Johnson students and staff. Jarred also discussed the project to renovate the playground and shared a QR code for donations. The Red Clay Education Foundation will be used as the funding organization. Several grant applications have been submitted but many exclude public schools. Jarred noted working with Krista Griffith and James Spadola to secure $50,000 of American Rescue Plan funds and thanked them for kicking off the effort for project as the proposed cost is $500,000 to create a safe, accessible playground and community park. The use of the playground by HCA and other community members during weekends/non-school time allows it to also be a community park. Jarred asked for to HCA residents to consider joining a subcommittee working on the playground for feedback on areas such as accessibility needs. Please reach out to Jarred Phillips at 302-332-0921 or jarred.phillips@gmail.com for information and/or donation details.

Representative Krista Griffith, Delaware General Assembly

Krista introduced herself as the Highlands state representative for the past two years after redistricting included the Highlands neighborhood into District 12. She expressed gratitude working with community members such as Jarred Phillips on the playground and Gary Linarducci on the pipe removal project. She also noted that the Bancroft Bridge is on target to be open in April 2025 and understands this to be a top priority for the Highlands community. She also recapped her work on economic issues for the state, the Joint Finance Committee, co-chair of the Life Science Caucus focused on programs recruiting and retaining talent from our universities in Delaware. As Chair of the Judiciary Committee, she was excited to share the work to get the Family Justice Centers up and running. The Family Justice Centers will assist victims of domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and human trafficking, allowing them to receive services in one location rather than going to many different agencies. She closed by thanking the

community offering her assistance, asking for HCA members to reach out to her or her aide, Ryan, if needed.

Captain Matt Rosaio, Wilmington Police Department (WPD)

Captain Rosaio opened his remarks letting the audience know to add their names to the police department's distribution list to be included in their public communications. He also introduced his team present for the meeting, including Barry the wellness dog, Community Engagement Officers, Partners in Care representatives, and Lieutenant Bozeman. Captain Rosaio provided WPD ComStat values at this time with a 25% decrease in part one crimes in sector 3. The Partners in Care Program began in March as a co-responder program pairing with trained officers with mental health clinicians and Christiana Care. Since March, 207 individuals have received services from this program, available at 302-576-3189 or **PartnersInCare@ChristianaCare.org**. Captain Rosaio went on to remind the audience to be mindful of preventing car-related crimes by not leaving the car running unattended while it warms up, hiding valuables, and to never leave a registered fire arm in the car overnight. As the holidays approach, he also asked for the community to be neighborly when packages are left out- make a plan with neighbors to bring them inside- or utilize the lockers that Amazon offers. Any unusual Ring/camera footage (or relevant to a specific situation) may be uploaded on WPD's website. In closure, Captain Rosario thanked Mayor Purzycki for his time as Mayor and support of WPD, as well as gratitude to all of the elected officials present.

Wilmington Mayor Mike Purzycki

Mayor Purzycki greeted HCA neighbors for the last time in his role as Mayor. He shared a retrospective covering his years and accomplishments as Mayor beginning with a few noteworthy quotes and top achievement lists. He continues with a summary of accomplishments including issuing $2 billion in building permits, building 4000 new apartments with 1500 of them being affordable housing, $3.5 million invested in Rodney Street Reservoir, 40 miles of newly paved roads, $26 million invested in community centers and parks, and $103 million in asset reserves. Mayor Purzycki also noted Wilmington 311 receiving 66,000 calls per year and able to resolve 82% of finance inquiries resolved with one call. He highlighted Economic Vitality (Incyte moving in, The Quoin, Chemours, CSC Station, and Pinebox warehouse with soundstage, new hotels and educational institutions), Downtown Dining (Bardea, Bardea Steak, Simmer Down Bar- top 10 best bars in America), City Living (Wilmington offsetting wage taxes going down with people working from home since the pandemic by more people moving into the city), Neighborhoods (examples of building renovations and clean teams), Keeping Us Safe (crediting WPD and WFD), HBCU Week (Disney replicated), Hub for Athletics (Eden Park redone, Abessinio Stadium), Parks and Public Spaces (Hicks Anderson Community Center, Rodney Street Reservoir, Maurice Pritchett Sr. Academy, Market Street bridge), Gibraltar (shared photos today versus 18 months ago of incredible progress toward revitalizing the buildings and grounds). Denison Hatch presented Mayor Purzycki with a gift, a painting by Wendy Hatch, with appreciation for his work.

Delaware Governor John Carney

Governor Carney addressed the HCA as the next mayor of Wilmington and began in crediting the record of Mayor Purzycki, thankful of how closely they worked on many initiatives including the Incyte project and progress in bringing higher education institutions to Wilmington. He went on to thank the district for the support in the election and stated that he is in a "listening and learning" process while wrapping up business as Governor. Governor Carney recapped some of the challenges he will face as Mayor (keeping up the downtown and riverfront areas, a compassionate collaboration across government agencies to address the homeless population, gun violence and gangs) as well as stories from knocking on doors in this election. Governor Carney closed with his belief regarding Delaware's tradition of working together.

[Governor Carney was followed by Shawn Heacock, Delaware State Parks, for an update on the Bancroft Bridge, however, he spoke for several minutes again after Shawn in response to questions from the audience.]

Governor Carney spoke on the topic of marijuana dispensaries in response to a question from the audience. He noted that the Wilmington City Council has not determined where to allow the dispensaries. A lottery took place last week for seven dispensaries in New Castle County. Some communities have put moratoriums in place to not allow them in their jurisdictions or put limitations on placement relative to each other, schools, parks, or churches. Mayor Purzycki added that they will have limitations of 2600 ft and be limited to C3 and C4 districts, while placement in C2 or C1 would need to go to the Board of Adjustments and input from the public. Mayor Purzycki stated that under the current situation there is no dispensary in the 8th district. He added that he received many emails from the 8th district as well as emails from the rest of the city. While some people do not want them in some places, as a matter of state law, New Castle County will have dispensaries.

An additional question was raised by Gary Linarducci regarding the public education system and whether Governor Carney sees hope in the direction it is going, noting that the Governor has spent a great deal of time and effort to improve it but it is still not where it needs to be. Governor Carney remains hopeful and credited a few reasons beginning with the Wilmington Learning Collaborative. They recommended removing Christina district from the city of Wilmington but did not pursue attempts to consolidate school districts. The new school Pritchett Academy opened, and other buildings have been closed and repurposed. Additionally, Governor Carney spoke about the need for better reading proficiency and comprehension, recommending programs for after school, weekends, and summers. Another audience comment noted the disparity in learning outcomes often traced back to what they don't have at home (access to books, being read to them, breakfast/food, sleep) or the presence of trauma. Governor Carney followed up with the need to focus on one child at a time and noted this is not a funding problem. He also acknowledged that students lost learning during Covid. He closed with optimism despite all the challenges.

Shawn Heacock, Delaware State Parks

Shawn introduced himself, Chief of Construction, and spoke about the Bancroft Bridge project. After four years of planning and working with FEMA, A-Del has been awarded the $2.6 million contract to replace the Bancroft Bridge. They are in the demo process right now, then the concrete pours will begin, and he cautioned that the concrete pours will be a lengthy process. After the concrete phase, then there will be a

flurry of activity expected, including the pipe removal, mid-February through mid-April. There has been one “surprise” to date: a pad was larger than expected and requires additional work to remove it, though this is not expected to delay plans. If there are no major weather events or construction surprises, the new bridge is expected to open on/by April 15, 2025.

Nathan Field, Wilmington City Council 8th District

Nathan opened his comments letting neighbors know the 2nd Annual “Light up the Tower” event is happening this coming Saturday at Rockford Tower, 2-6pm. The event will take place even though on-going construction will prevent the lights from going on at this time. Secondly, on the topic of marijuana dispensaries, he recommended for everyone to read the maps and proposals, stating it will be in the 8th district if they’re allowed to do so. Nathan has been receiving calls for two years from Lawyers for Marijuana investors enquiring about specific properties in the 8th District. Nathan also noted George Frankel’s work to bring back the holiday lights project on Delaware Avenue, the Delaware Art Museum has an amazing new exhibit, and the new murals all over the neighborhood have added excitement for the exhibit.

James Spadola, Wilmington City Council At-Large

James shared a story crediting the Partners in Care in helping a person who was spending time near the Triangle Neighborhood and their work to resolve the situation. James also highlighted the topic of regulating AirBNBs that will be coming to the city council and he expressed gratitude to Captain Rosaio noting there was an assault that took place recently on the 1900 block of Shallcross Avenue. He reminded the audience about the upcoming election and early voting taking place now.

Tish Bracy, Wilmington City Council At-Large

Tish greeted the audience and noted that all topics were covered during the evening. She also reiterated the reminder to vote in the upcoming election.

Denison Hatch closed the meeting at 8:40pm.

Respectively Submitted,

Lindsay Abrahams, HCA Secretary