

Minutes from May 19, 2021, regular HNA meeting
Submitted by secretary Robyn Ross

HNA president Coan Dillahunty called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm

Carolyn Palaima moved that we approve the minutes from the 3.31 meeting as posted, and Mary Ann Osborne seconded

Coan said that for our July 21 meeting we have scheduled the Watershed department to talk about Waller Creek and habitat restoration, and the city's chief homeless strategy officer Dianna Grey to talk about homelessness.

With increased vaccinations the July 4 parade seems like a possibility. This is an opportunity for a volunteer to organize it. Carolyn Palaima mentioned Lee parents might be interested and that we could post a volunteer call on groups.io.

Coan has checked on reopening of the rec centers for in-person meetings, but there's no news yet.

Bruce Fairchild gave the treasurer's report.

-HNA's checking account (through which most business is conducted) had \$4711.21 at the last meeting. Since then we've collected more dues, minus the fees to collect them, and balance is now \$4757.91.

-Our money market account is about the same, with a balance of \$2509.50.

-What is not reflected in tonight's statement is the \$250 bill for the first newsletter, which Bruce is about to pay.

Secretary/newsletter editor Robyn Ross explained the expenditure and newsletter.

-The newsletter has restarted after about 5 years, and the first issue was mailed this week. It will be published the months of our regular meetings (next issue will be July).

-Thanks to the volunteers who contributed.

-HNA is working with Neighborhood News, a community newsletter company, to handle design, ad sales, printing and mailing. They mail it because advertisers prefer it to be mailed. Ours is mailed to 1050 addresses in Hancock, and for that circulation NN charges \$500/issue, but most clients are HOAs, so they dropped our price to \$250/issue. This covers postage and handling, and NN keeps the ad revenue.

-Robyn said running a newsletter involves four jobs: editorial, design, ads, printing/distribution. Since we didn't have volunteer infrastructure for all that, we could get the newsletter started sooner by outsourcing the non-editorial tasks.

-The executive committee approved the expense but agreed it's not sustainable long term, because our 1-year contract costs \$1500, and in a typical year we bring in \$200-700 in dues. We'd need to raise money for the newsletter or find volunteers to bring all jobs back "in house."

Q from Barbara Epstein: Did you consider just doing an online newsletter to save money?

A: Yes, but when I asked, most people said they preferred a physical newsletter. It also makes a statement about neighborhood identity to have a physical product. There is an opt-out link in the first issue for people who don't want paper.

Volunteer opportunities: Contact newsletter@hancockna.org if you want to write or take pictures. Also reach out if you want to be a block captain. Robyn said that regardless of the newsletter's future, we should build back our block captain network to check on neighbors in

emergencies. There is also a volunteer opportunity for an organized “people” person to coordinate the block captain network.

Coan gave an update on the golf course.

-The city’s Parks Board had planned to discuss the issue at its April 27 meeting, but that’s been postponed, partly because the board was waiting for the results of PARD’s survey. These were shared with the neighborhood on May 10.

-PARD staff also have said there will be community engagement/small group meetings in April/May, which may have been pushed to May/June. If you find out about these, please share what you know.

-Coan has learned that April was a record month at the golf course, with almost \$49K in greens fees; the yearly total so far is almost \$275K.

Robyn shared Hyde Park secretary Ben Reid’s notes about the Speedway post office closure.

-In mid-April, Ben met with Speedway post office manager Bernardino Vidauri, who confirmed that location would close by the end of June. Ben reached out to Austin Postmaster Doug Watson and his assistant Amber Evans, who told Ben the owner would not renew the lease.

-HPNA officers later met with property owner Blake Thompson. He said he’d been in negotiations with the USPS leasing entity, which is based in Denver, since 2018. The issue boils down to the USPS and Blake getting different appraisals for the property, and how that influences the lease. Blake said he tried to come to agreement with USPS and offered a lease extension earlier this year but did not get a response.

-Blake owns the post office building; the apartments just north of it; the parking lot across Speedway; and the house between the lot and the fire station. The post office building was constructed in the late ’50s but has never been owned by the USPS.

-Blake purchased it in 2015. His immediate plan is to do asbestos abatement and rent it out, initially as creative office space. Long-term it could be commercial and/or residential. Blake is open to including a storefront post office.

-The HPNA officers encouraged him to stay in touch. For now, they are going to thank the postal workers with cookies and a sign. Manager Vidauri had heard the plan is to get a post office back in the area within a couple years, perhaps at Central Park or Hancock Center (although not in the Sears building because Central Health has bought that).

Your options if you have a P.O. Box at the Speedway location:

-Do nothing, and your box will physically move to the Northcross Drive post office. You do not need to update your address or zip code.

-If you use the “street addressing” service, through which you receive UPS and FedEx packages at your P.O. Box, you do need to update your customer agreement with the post office because you’ll use the physical address of the Northcross post office.

-You can get a different P.O. Box at a location other than Northcross, such as 35th/Lamar or Tarrytown, but of course your address will change.

-Decide by June 5, because the Speedway location is closing June 19 and it takes 2 weeks for changes to be processed.

Barbara Epstein gave a summary of her research and advocacy so far.

-She has contacted the local postmaster to lobby for a replacement post office location. She learned the postal services was looking at options in Hancock Center.

-She communicated with a representative of Regency Centers, the owners of Hancock shopping center. This person said Regency would be willing to lease to USPS if the postal service indicated this.

- She contacted Congressman Roger Williams and asked him to advocate for our neighborhood to have a post office. His staff said “we’ll pass along your concerns.”
- A new deputy postmaster general was appointed May 12, so Barbara initiated a letter-writing campaign directly to him for his help.
- Barbara encourages everyone to write a letter advocating for a nearby post office, a very basic government service.
- Coan said HNA will send a letter to all interested parties. Robyn said she can ask Hyde Park and Eastwoods if they want to sign on; Jim Schwobel from Eastwoods NA is also concerned about this.

Contact information for letters:

Mr. Douglas Tulino
 Deputy Postmaster General
 2833 Alabama Ave SE,
 Washington DC 20020

Douglas Watson, PCC Postal Co-Chair
 8225 Cross Park Dr
 Austin, TX 78710-9998

Congressman Roger Williams
 5806 Mesa Drive, Suite 390
 Austin, TX 78731
 Austin office 512-473-8910
 Washington D.C. office (202) 225-9896

Parks Committee chair Carolyn Palaima presented an update about Community Activated Park Projects and trail signage.

- The maintenance on the trail around the golf course is almost finished.
- The team HNA coordinates with includes PARD landscaper Darcy Nuffer, who suggested HNA put up signage around the trail indicating that it’s paid for by the HNA (through its funds held at the Austin Parks Foundation).
- This would help trail users understand that the neighborhood association is actively involved and might incentivize them to take better care of the trail by staying on the path (the erosion problems on the 38th Street side are exacerbated by people creating side trails).
- Projects like the proposed signage are handled through PARD’s Community Activated Park Projects program, which is the mechanism for doing any work on parkland. This is how HNA accesses the funds held at Austin Parks Foundation.
- The Parks Committee will submit a CAPP form to add signs on the trail stating that it’s paid for by the HNA and will work with PARD on the details. The cost is estimated at a few thousand dollars.
- Once this is worked out, the Parks Committee will come back to HNA and present the full project and get input and approval to expend the funds.
- Barbara Epstein suggested the signs have a slogan or clever tagline, or even a cartoon drawing (a person falling off a cliff!), to get people’s attention. There could be a contest or at least call for ideas sent out to the membership.

There was a time for new business to be raised, or ideas for future meetings/speakers.

Our guests, Theresa Sifuentes and Lt. Kevin Glover from the Austin Fire Department's community outreach division, spoke.

-Lt. Glover said that while Station 9 (at Speedway/43rd) is being remodeled, the whole crew is based 1 mile away at the intersection of Speedway/30th/San Jacinto.

-Firefighters work 24 hours on, 48 hours off. The majority of their calls are medical calls, which include traffic accidents, fires and other types of medical calls. They are all EMT-B certified, so they often start life support before EMS arrives.

Safety tips:

-Have a CO detector near each sleeping area, especially if you have gas appliances. Mount them on the ceiling. CO alarms are now required by code if you do any type of remodel.

-If you smell gas while walking around and can't tell where it's coming from, call AFD. If you smell gas in your home, make sure your burners are off and your pilot light is lit. If that checks out, call AFD.

-Make sure you have working smoke detectors. Test them monthly. Make an evacuation plan and practice it. Make sure kids know where to meet the family outside, in the event of a fire.

-Pay attention to how you use candles – keep them attended and away from drapes. Some cooking fires can easily be smothered with a pan lid.

-Have a fire extinguisher.

Theresa Sifuentes explained AFD's smoke alarm program.

-It's a free program (aka, paid for by our tax dollars) and open to anyone in Austin.

-Fire code advises smoke alarms in every bedroom, the adjacent hallways, and the living room. If your smoke alarms are older than 8 years, they need to be replaced.

-You can call AFD for an assessment/replacement of your alarms. The alarms they use have a 10-year life expectancy (which includes the battery). Firefighters come to your home and assess for fire hazards and replace the smoke detectors.

-They also have smoke alarms for the hearing impaired.

-New homes often have hard-wired smoke alarms, and AFD cannot replace these because they're installed by an electrician. But they can install battery-operated ones [I think this means "in addition"]

AFD also has community education/training programs:

-Hands-on fire extinguisher training. They teach people how to use an extinguisher properly by putting out a simulated fire.

-Home fire safety training. AFD has a trailer that's a little home on wheels with a kitchen (the stove and trash can "catch fire") and a kids' bedroom. This is a good tool for practicing using a fire extinguisher and helping kids learn how to get out of the house via the window. With two weeks' notice and guaranteed attendance of 50 people, the AFD can bring this to community events.

-The fire department can also lead our 4th of July parade if it happens.

The Red Angels program:

-AFD partners with nurses from Concordia, ACC and Austin Public Health to offer in-home well checks. This is especially helpful for elderly and mobility impaired people who haven't been able to get to the doctor. Residents can request a nurse come to their home and conduct a well check (glucose, blood pressure, etc.) while firefighters replace the smoke alarms and conduct a home hazard assessment. The nurses can talk with residents about their medications or any concerns. This program is also free/underwritten by tax dollars.

-AFD is planning to do door-to-door outreach this summer about these programs.

-In the meantime, to request these smoke alarm or well check services, contact Theresa.Sifuentes@austintexas.gov

-Robyn agreed with Ms. Sifuentes' suggestion to include this information in the newsletter and said the block captains could help identify homes that wish to use the Red Angels program, saving AFD canvassing time

-Andrew Dillon remarked that these programs are tremendous contributions and that we need to get the word out. Ms. Sifuentes suggested that we encourage Council to publicize them more.