

HILLANDALE CITIZENS ASSOCIATION (HCA)

Minutes of Public Meeting: Wednesday, 25 October 2023

6:15 p.m.

Margie and I showed up at the WeAchieve/CHI Center for setup. We were relieved to see the door open and light streaming out of the activity room. Inside, we met the janitor Thomas and his young assistant, Lee. They were prepared to help us set up for the meeting.

The room was filled with arrays of tables that were two abreast and three long, or thus six tables in all, surrounded by chairs. For the meeting, however, we needed only a few tables set up by the door and one at the front of the room. The main space of the room needed to be filled with chairs for the expected attendees.

Thomas and Lee thereupon took down about 30 long tables and started moving the folding chairs to the central area intended for the meeting. It would have been impossible for the rest of us to have done all of this heavy physical work in the short time before the meeting.

Out of gratitude for the inestimable value of their work, I awarded each of them \$20 for their service. These men had likewise performed the task of arranging chairs and tables for the community dinner in May 2023, a service for which I likewise gave them each \$20. I was relieved when the HCA Executive Committee repaid me for these well-earned gratuities.

6:30 p.m.

Tom Helfand and **Russ Harris** from the HCA Executive Committee showed up to help. Tom took charge of arranging the c. 60 folding chairs for people to sit during the meeting. Russ, meanwhile, set up this microphone/loudspeaker system for the meeting, which proved to be of tremendous help. For her part, Margie focused on setting up the two long tables by the door, where she planned to welcome neighbors, encourage them to sign in, and point them to the handouts by the door from both the HCA and the local police. My job was to set up the everything else, which involved tables featuring the four poster-board displays—Hillandale Park, Hillandale Gateway, Hillandale Center, Cresthaven Drive—that I made. Many thanks to **Judy Rein**, who set out the bottles of water, candies, and napkins. I also set up the easel board, which contained the meeting's agenda.

7:00-7:15 p.m.

People began to arrive about 7:00 p.m., the advertised beginning time for the meeting. The earliest guest of all was **Lou Giacchino**, who was the HCA president many years previously. (Note: The next day, Mr. Giacchino graciously called to congratulate us on having run a great meeting.) Among the early arrivals also was Commander David McBain, who was the featured speaker of the evening, but who was not slated to begin until 7:30.

This first quarter hour was spent in innumerable friendly conversations all around, as the hosts and guests welcomed the new arrivals. There was a pleasant, many-sided, free-for-all conversation. **Councilmember Kristin Mink** also arrived with an aide to attend the meeting.

7:15-7:25 p.m.

By this time, the crowd had filled most of the seats in the room, the featured speaker was already at hand, along with Councilmember Mink. **HCA President Margie Goergen-Rood** thereupon convened the meeting. She welcomed all of the residents and guests, calling out for

special mention both Commander McBain and Councilmember Mink. Margie also laid out the agenda for the meeting. Finally, she invited Commander McBain to make his presentation.

7:25-7:50 p.m.

Commander David McBain made his wide-ranging and fascinating presentation. He opened it by noting with gratitude that the meeting's agenda included information and the website for contributing to the relief account for **Police Sergeant Patrick Kepp**, who had been recently injured grievously. (Note: www.foplodge35.com/mcleorf.) McBain noted also that Kepp's long-time fellow police partner, who had been scheduled to appear with McBain, had actually been at the hospital with Sgt. Kepp continuously since the incident.

McBain noted that Hillandale is a kind of low-crime island surrounded by jurisdictions with higher levels of crime. He noted in particular that the Hillandale neighborhood suffers few serious, violent crimes, although the shopping centers see somewhat higher crime rates. The 3rd Police District, he informed us, is both the most densely-populated district in Montgomery County, but also has the most crime—except in Hillandale.

McBain declared that his proudest achievement during his three years as 3rd District Police Commander has been his program of Community Outreach. This has involved sending the police out into the neighborhoods and to establish relationships with the resident. In fact, Hillandale was the first of ultimately several Adopt-a-Neighborhood programs, which was created with the assistance of **J.J. Green and Hillandale United**. Other programs have included, among others, the Coffee With a Cop program at the local Starbucks. McBain sees these programs basically as normalizing police-citizen relations, so that when crimes occur and police are called in, they are not seen as a foreign presence.

Commander McBain also spoke candidly about challenges to the work of the police. One major challenge is the shortage of police officers. His district should employ 164 officers, but currently he has only 136, or about 83% of the ideal total. As a consequence, the officers on duty are also called on to work extra hours or extra shifts. Although they are paid at an overtime rate, this extra workload wears on the officers in the long term.

McBain acknowledged that, for various reasons, police work was no longer seen as desirable. He noted that when he began his police career, 2,000 applicants vied for 50 openings on the force, but that today, fewer than 100 applicants applied for the same number of openings. The police refuse to lower their standards, so there are inevitable gaps in staffing. McBain noted also that the several jurisdictions in the area compete for a shrinking pool of new police candidates.

7:50 – 8:05 p.m.

Commander McBain then turned the meeting over for questions from the audience. The first questions concerned an alleged lack of policing over cars with noisy mufflers on New Hampshire Avenue and the heavy use of fireworks on a couple nights each year. McBain referred to his earlier points about the staffing shortages in the police department. He stated also that police have to prioritize calls for service between more serious and less serious crimes.

8:05 – 8:10 p.m.

Councilmember Kristen Mink stepped up to speak, and she supported Commander McBain by speaking about the shortage of police officers, which she was committed to alleviating. She also spoke in defense of her proposed regulation that would prohibit county

police officers from stopping vehicles unless a moving violation had occurred. She said that numerous issues for which cars were pulled over, like non-functioning tail lights could be handled by sending a ticket in the mail.

8:10 – 8:20 p.m.

Commander McBain continued answering questions about police service to the community. He noted that 3rd District police officers stopped 3,400 vehicles in 2023 so far, about 1,000 more than any other district. In addition, the 3rd District leads the other districts in arrests for Driving Under the Influence (DUI). He regretted, however, that staffing shortages prevented the systematic use of speed traps, as in previous years.

8:20 – 8:30 p.m.

The subject of the Enclave came up. **Commander McBain** began by stating that the problems in the Enclave cannot be solved by the police alone. He stated that problems there have been amplified by the landlord's actions in abolishing the concierge service, which provided staff round-the-clock to monitor the entryways. The landlords also gave up the practice of locking the entry doors at night, so that virtually anybody can enter or exit at will.

Councilmember Kristen Mink stepped up to the microphone again to amplify McBain's statements, because she has worked diligently with Enclave residents to improve their lives. She stated that the Enclave encompasses over 1,000 apartment units, or roughly equivalent in population to another Hillandale. Mink has been using county resources to try to compel the landlords to rectify the literally thousands of complaints that have been made by residents.

8:30 – 8:40 p.m.

David McBain concluded his talk by urging residents to take measures to avoid becoming victims of crime. He noted that auto thefts are way up this year. As in the past, crime syndicates steal luxury cars, but the new element is the many young people who steal cars for joy rides. In response, residents should make their cars unattractive to theft by removing valuables from the sight of passersby. When stopping at a convenience store for coffee, they should turn off their car and take their key fobs with them. (Apparently, many people leave their vehicles running while they run in to buy coffee.) When residents walk in Hillandale, they should ideally walk in pairs and be aware of their surroundings.

Above all, McBain urged residents to organize—as with the HCA—and make contact with the police. **Community Affairs Officer Glenda Franco** does community outreach full time, and she and other officers are prepared to meet with residents.

8:40 – 8:58 p.m.

HCA President Margie Goergen-Rood then took the floor and thanked both **Commander David McBain** and **Councilmember Kristen Mink** for their contributions to the evening's discussion. The speakers received from the audience prolonged and enthusiastic applause.

Margie then called attention to the proposed HCA budget for the year 2023-2024. (The proposed budget was printed in the latest Hillandale Bulletin and also distributed at the door.) She asked whether there were any comments on the budget. There were none. It was passed overwhelmingly.

Margie then brought up the subject of the election of new members to the HCA Executive Committee. Ballots were passed out to all residents in attendance. She referred to the slate of candidates that had been established, and as she called out their names, she asked for each of the candidates to stand and say something about themselves. These dozen or so people thereupon stood, one-by-one, and talked briefly about themselves and their connections to the community

Margie then stated that customarily we voted in the slate by acclamation. However, the ballot was incomplete, because no candidates had come forward to fill some of the posts, and so she asked for nominations from the floor.

In the following minutes, four individuals requested to be added to the ballot. They were: **Mary Bergman** (Treasurer); **Nancy Stark** (West Hillandale At-Large); and **Melissa Knapp** and **Marcy Schlissel** (Welcome Committee). These names were duly added to the ballot.

Margie asked the attendees to vote for the slate by a show of hands, which was duly accomplished. The slate of candidates was thereby voted into office. Margie then declared the meeting adjourned.

8:58 – 9:40 p.m.

While many people left directly, many others stayed around to talk with others. Knots of people soon clustered around Commander McBain, Councilmember Mink, and the newly-elected HCA President Jeremiah Pope. People left the room, and about 9:40 p.m. Paul, Margie, and Commander McBain left the room.

The ever-reliable janitor Thomas was there to lock up, turn out the lights, and ultimately, to re-set the tables and chairs in the room for their next occupants.

--Draft of Minutes by Paul Rood, HCA Vice President for Programs, 30 October 2023