**Seminary Hill Association, Inc.**

***Special Meeting with Members of the Alexandria School Board***

**19 April 2016**

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM by President Nancy Jennings at Immanuel Church On-The-Hill. The purpose of the meeting was to allow members of SHA to participate in a question and answer session with members of the Alexandria School Board. Four members of the Alexandria School Board attended; all three from SHA’s District B—Cindy Anderson**,** Margaret Lorber, and Veronica Nolan—and one from District C Christopher Lewis.

The School Board members introduced themselves and gave a brief history of their background. Then five topics of interest were discussed. The dialogue was extensive, so these minutes represent only the gist of questions, answers, and discussion on the main topics.

1. **Installation of lights at the T.C. Williams stadium**

*President Jennings* started the session with background on the issue and the relationship between the Alexandria School Board (ASB) and the Alexandria Department of Parks and Recreation (P&R).

*Chris*: We have been looking at the overall overhaul of the TCW field including lights, scoreboard and press box. ASB and P&R are jointly evaluating the best course of action.

*Jack Sullivan* commented that the ASB hired a lawyer at a cost of $100K to help defend the ASB against citizens who “oppose the lights.”

*Chris*: Yes, we did hire a lawyer but not just to address the light opposition issue.

*Joe Fischer* asked what happened to previous “guarantees” that there would be no lights at TCW.

*Chris:* Times have changed and we have to look at what most benefits the school.

*Bill Goff* said the lights would be 21 feet from the closest residence and all other lighted fields in Alexandria are at least 150 feet away. Maybe we should put the stadium in other parts of the City.

*Lillian Patterson* commented that it’s a shame school kids won’t have opportunities to play ball on Friday nights.

*Lillian Patterson* said it would be a shame that the kids won’t be playing Friday night games in college, since colleges play their games in the daytime.

*Veronica*: There are some racial concerns here – some people can’t seem to trust black kids at Friday night games – the fear of violence.

*Bill Goff* noted there are people using the field without permits.

*Carter Flemming* observed that track meets at the field cause a lot of noise – the loudspeakers are pointed too high and the noise carries into the surrounding neighborhood. Maybe we should put the field at George Washington (GW) Middle School.

*Overall, the members of the School Board acknowledged the concerns of the SHA residents and indicated they would discuss them with the entire School Board.*

1. **The Expansion of Patrick Henry Elementary School**

*Mary Biegel*, SHA’s representative on the Advisory Group, said the problem is mostly “process.” Things seem to change from meeting to meeting without citizen input.

*Chris*: Preliminary designs are always subject to change – the ASB reacted strongly to the Option A-1 initiative and it has been sent back to the Planning staff for more review and work.

*Jim Durham* commented that kids used to be able to walk or ride a bike to school but this site plan makes that option too dangerous.

*Dorothea Peters* said that Latham Street is too narrow for school buses.

*Bill Goff* queried the need for an 18,000 square foot recreation center – it’s too big for a ‘neighborhood’ recreation center. He is also afraid that P&R will someday decide to put lights on the field at Patrick Henry.

*Mary Biegel* said they need to put in the site plan that there would be “no lights.”

1. **Management of Funds by the Alexandria City Public Schools.**

*Bill Goff* said that ACPS gets their funding from City Council but money designated for school maintenance always seems to go elsewhere and the schools suffer for it.

*Chris*: We are now using a new budget system to prioritize maintenance at the schools.

*Cindy*: In the past, we were doing “reactive maintenance” vice “planned maintenance.”

*Jim Durham* asked whether the ACPS has the right person as the “Chief Maintainer.”

*Chris*: Yes, we do, and new personnel are being hired to help alleviate this problem.

*Jack Sullivan* commented that we need to keep pre-school education in their respective neighborhood schools vice a central area in the City for all preschoolers.

*Jim Durham* said that preschool is not presently in the ACPS Long Range Education Plan.

*Chris*: We will be going back to the “drawing board” on this issue because of funding shortfalls.

1. **What do you see as the needs of the ACPS in the next 5 years?**

*Veronica:* We need the proper funding and stewardship of that funding. We also need to implement a good strategic plan as well as working on a new curriculum.

*Chris*: We need to improve academic achievement.

*Margaret*: We need better achievement by the students as well as a need for adult education.

1. **How can residents of Seminary Hill help?**

*Chris*: Send emails and correspondence to the School Board and if you don’t hear back, send it again.

**Note:** The above Q&A’s represent the most significant discussions of the five topics. Not every comment was included because there was considerable discussion throughout the meeting, particularly on the first three issues.

President Jennings thanked the members of the School Board for attending the meeting and for responding to the many questions from the audience.

Having no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:42 PM.

Richard Hayes, Recorder

**Board Members present**: Nancy Jennings, Joanne Lepanto, Dick Hayes, Lillian Patterson, Carter Flemming, Dick Hobson, Jack Sullivan, Joe Fischer, Jim Durham, and Bill Goff.

**School Board Members**: Cindy Anderson, Margaret Lorber, Veronica Nolan and Christopher Lewis.

**Others in attendance:** Mary Biegel, Fran Terrell, Dorothea Peters, Steve Hurkem, Carol Johnson, and several others who did not sign the attendance sheet.