

Seminary Hill Association Board  
April 19, 2005

Meeting called to order at 7:34 PM by Joe Gerard.

Joe Gerard, President and Vice President  
Jack Sullivan, Treasurer  
Laura Vetter, Secretary and EHSy  
Cindy Gurne, Communications Officer  
Lillian Patterson, Area 1  
Tom Kerester, Area 2  
Dick Hobson, Area 3  
Damon Wright, Area 4  
Dick Hayes, Area 5  
Pat Lidy, Area 7  
Richard Dressner, Area 8  
Bob Coulter, Area 9  
Charles Ablard, At-Large  
Joe Fischer, At-Large  
Bruce McCarthy, At-Large  
Nell Vetter, At-Large  
Frank Putzu, Past President  
Mary Lewis Hix, VTSn

**Police Report**

Sargeant Bartlett reported that crime down 3% for Alex and 14% for the Assoc since Jan. 1.

Minutes approved for

**Treasurer's Report**

Dick Hayes reported balance of \$21,971.

**Minutes**

Changes will be submitted and minutes approved by email. LV will not be able to attend next month's meeting.

**Area Reports**

Area 1: Lillian Patterson reported

Area 2: Tom Kerester reported

Area 3: Dick Hobson

Area 4: Damon Wright reported

Area 5: Dick Hayes reported

Area 7: Pat Lidy reported

Area 8: Richard Dressner reported on Varsity Park parking issues. City Council approved changing the city ordinance to allow a change in the city ordinance to allow a new zone to be formed to restrict overnight parking to cars with city stickers on them. Over 90% of home/owners in the area signed the position. Success story.

Area 9: Bob Coulter reported

Charles Ablard reported \$3750 grant. Ablard is pursuing SHA applying for a historic Alex grant. Motion to submit application of \$2500 historic Alex grant. Motion passed.

Dick Hobson for At-Large rep.. Dick Hobson nominated Carter Fleming for At-Large vacancy. Motion to nominate Carter Fleming passed. Her credentials were described. Laura Vetter inquired about the potential Area 4 vacancy.

Andy \_\_\_\_\_ a resident of St. Stephen's Road commented that trash collection has been outsourced. Discussion ensued of poor trash collection since outsourcing.

Area 4: Damon Wright moved to Area 9 from 4. Area 4 is not officially vacant. Carol Maxwell's old area discussed. SHA is seeking a rep for her old area. Call put forth for volunteers.

The Budget and property taxes

Paul Freedman, respecting Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Comm representing Ludwig Gaines attended to hear the community's concerns about the budget and property tax issues. Dick Hobson noted that Gaines lives in the SHA area. Joe Gerard gave background noting that SHA board voted in support of capping the growth of the Alex budget inflation plus 3%. Joe reported that 8 neighborhood associations support such a cap. City Council will vote on the tax rate on May 2nd. The announced rate so far is 8 cents. Freedman announced that their meetings are public. Gerard noted that City Council has been engaged on this issue. The petition, emails, letters and meetings such as this one are our best means to influence city council on this issue.

Bill Roberts asked why can't the city live within its means and shouldn't more revenue be coming to city from the development in Eisenhower Valley. Roberts wants to see a cap on expenses. Roberts supports zero base budgeting.

Cindy Gurne inquired about the balance of revenue from various sources, ie single family property taxes and business etc.

Freedman responded that the majority of income comes residential property taxes. City Council is considering new sources of revenue, ie movie theaters. Freedman suggested searching the budget memos on the city's website. Gurne referenced specific items, such as hiring 14 additional police officers. Freedman explained how such decisions are made.

Freedman said that a conservative position is taken toward hiring new staff creating new positions. Dick Hayes stated that he believes that city spending is out of control by growing 8% from last year. He challenged specific items, such as additional employees, TC Williams HS construction, wiring King Street wireless, lighted stadium for Friday night football games, and all-sports facility. Tom Schindken of Ivor Lane thanked SHA for inviting him to the meeting and then stated that the residents of Alexandria should remember that we live in a democracy and should expect City Council to be responsive and take a position on the issue.

Christine Michaelis made the point that for families with children it is difficult to budget with the escalating property taxes. Christine asked what is the PTO paying in property taxes, in light of the resources they are placing on the city. Freedman said that the PTO was approved by the previous city council. Freedman did not know how much they are bringing in revenue. Hobson reported that SHA opposed the PTO development, b/c the city did not require a direct beltway connection. Christine asked if the city has ever considered imposing a city tax on renters, who do not pay real estate taxes. Freedman responded that a program exists to assist low income homeowners, but Bob Coulter responded that the program is so restrictive that it is irrelevant. Freedman suggested contacting City Council on this issue. John Schmucher of Quaker Lane 1965 \$12000 to over \$900000 for this year's assessment. Schmucher detailed his increase in assessments. He suggested varying/schewing the tax rate on different types (ie. condos, townhouses, single family homes, businesses) He offered copies of the Ketty report of the 1970's. The tax rate is the same for businesses and residences, according to \_\_\_\_\_. Hobson agreed, but explained that the business community has lobbied against this, so no distinction in the rate is permitted. Two proposals in state law: not raising assessment for tax rate purposes above what one paid for their house or not being able to increase property taxes above 5%.

Dick Hobson applauded all the residents of SHA who have spoken out on this issue. Courteny Welton of Kingston is anyone on city council opposing the growth in the city budget. Joe explained that last year only one person spoke out against budget growth compared to this year, when many speaking out against unrestrained city budget growth. Freedman defended the budget growth by explaining the balance of pressures of expenses versus revenue. Lou Cordia introduced by Joe Gerard. Lou was instrumental in opposing the Connector. Lou Cordia admitted that until recently he did not look at his property tax bill b/c it was buried in his mortgage. Cordia believes that the budget process is backward: assessments, tax rate, then budget is set. Cordia explained SHA's position of growth limited inflation to 3%. Cordia believes that fiscal restraints need to be imposed to put the brakes on budget growth. We cut into family budgets to fund the growth in the city budget. Cordia explained the difference in taxes which would be owed based on the 8% growth rate proposed by the city versus SHA's proposed 3% compromise. 1945 signatures obtained in ten days, since the petition started circulating noting that city council members won by less than 5000 votes. So goal of 5000 signatures. He noted that under the 3% compromise the city budget and property taxes will still increase. Cordia suggested that the additional unprojected revenue should go into a rainy day fund. He challenged that city's claims that expenses are increasing by more than 3%, b/c the citizens have to absorb similar increases. Joe Fischer inquired about city council claim that the city is getting less money from the feds and the state govt. and made the point that

Alexandria homeowners are the customers and need to be treated as such. Cordia noted that a broad base of people are involved in this issue. He said that Fed and state money to the city is increasing not decreasing. Cordia explained that budget staffers tried not to include Fed and state funds, but Cordia successfully challenged the city staff on this issue. Cordia invited everyone to sign the petition. Sean McGlaughlin, who is new to Seminary Hill, was introduced by Dick Hobson. Most people in attendance received the postcard from SHA on this issue. Gerard thanked Gurne. Gurne thanked Kerester.

Meeting adjourned at 9:

Joe Fischer and Dick Hobson. and Jack Sullivan for Christine as Area 4 rep.