

Seminary Hill Association Board
March 15, 2005

Meeting called to order at 7:35 PM by Joe Gerard.

Joe Gerard, President and Vice President
Jack Sullivan, Treasurer
Laura Vetter, Secretary and EHS
Cindy Gurne, Communications Officer
Dick Hobson, Area 3
Damon Wright, Area 4
Dick Hayes, Area 5
Pat Lidy, Area 7
Richard Dressner, Area 8
Joe Fischer, At-Large
Bruce McCarthy, At-Large
Charles Ablard, At-Large
Nell Vetter, At-Large
Frank Putzu, Past President
Mary Lewis Hix, VTS

Minutes

The minutes were approved with changes for the January and February 2004 monthly meetings, as well as the Strategic Planning meeting.

Treasurer's Report

Jack Sullivan reported a balance of \$22,567.06 as of March 1.

He also reported that representatives from INOVA hospital want to attend our next meeting, but their issues may be handled outside of the monthly meeting.

The April meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 19th to accommodate Mayor Euillle attending our next meeting.

Historic Property Survey

Charles Ablard introduced Barbara Ballantine, who has been retained by SHA to work on the historic survey. Barbara Ballantine comes highly credentialed. She displayed a map defining the survey area. She is identifying the available materials. She seeks to get the community excited by our historic resources. She plans to conduct oral histories of those individuals, who have lived here a long time. Resources and training are available at Alexandria Archeology for SHA volunteers to learn to carry out this work. After the survey is complete, SHA will need to decide what to do with the information, such as produce a publication. SHA will start with the SHA boundaries. It is unlikely that SHA will pursue historic status for the entire are, but SHA may perhaps pursue designation by

theme i.e. the Civil War. Barbara Ballantine showed us the small area plan for Seminary Hill and Strawberry Hill. SHA comprises 75% of the Seminary and Strawberry Hill area. Dick Hobson reported that there is still a Seminary stop on the rail road at South Quaker Lane. An emphasis will be placed on the gathering the information for the use by the residents, rather than pursuing historic designation. The plan is to recruit volunteers for this project through our website and emails, as well as publicizing the project through the Alexandria Gazette newspaper. Cindy Gurne inquired about the older churches as a source of volunteers, including Immanuel on-the-Hill and the Methodist Church on North Howard Street, as well as Temple Beth El.

Because institutional histories have already been produced for Episcopal High School and Virginia Theological Seminary, these two institutions are not included in the scope of the project.

Update on Strategic Efforts

Joe Gerard suggested that the property tax/assessment issue may serve as an issue to recruit new members. Joe Gerard suggested that we produce a one page flier from the letter that SHA sent to the mayor on the property tax issue. The overarching point should be that SHA is committed to this issue and SHA is pursuing both short and long term solutions to this problem. Bob Coulter suggested that SHA pursue and suggest a specific tax rate number. Jack Sullivan reported on the last SHA committee meeting on this issue. Jack Sullivan suggested a cap of the inflation rate, plus small percentage. Jack Sullivan explained that there is a precedent for such a cap in Alexandria in the past. According to Dick Hobson, no one on Seminary Hill would qualify for the property tax exemption, which currently exists for low income residents. Lou Cordia has the email list from the last connector fight. This list could be helpful for publicizing this issue.

What will be the percentage tax rate reduction be this year and what long term solutions does SHA want to pursue? A cap would protect the city from committing to long term financial commitments that it could not keep if the current real estate boom goes bust.

The city budget has been growing by 8% each year. Joe Gerard reported that the group that decides the assessments works independently of the city.

Bob Coulter believes SHA should use this issue to increase our membership.

A potential cap and expanded home owners exemption were suggested as long term solutions.

According to Joe Gerard, people are more carefully scrutinizing the budget, due to this issue.

Bob Coulter suggested a one piece mailer emphasizing the budget and SHA leadership on this issue. Discussion ensued about getting the mailer out before the next SHA meeting, so that people from SHA will attend the April SHA meeting with the mayor. According to Dick Hobson, the Old Town, North Ridge and Del Ray neighborhood associations are on board with this issue. Smith's position is that there should be no budget increase above inflation. A motion was made by Joe Gerard that he draft bullet points for a postcard on the property tax issue for the board to review and approve to get the mailing out before the next meeting. The motion was seconded and passed. The mailing will go to everyone on Seminary Hill. A discussion of the text ensued. The main point for the mailing is that SHA is working on this issue and to include contact information to join SHA and the SHA website information.

Joe Gerard reported on Mayor Euille's response. According to Joe Gerard, Mayor Euille may go as high as a 12 cent reduction.

Councilman MacDonald's response was more guarded and defended the budget.

Councilman Smedberg raised the issue of unfunded mandates. SHA needs to consider what areas we would be able to see limited in growth i.e. open space acquisition and traffic calming. Ludwig Gaines seems to be sympathetic on this issue. Krupricka is amenable to a cap.

A discussion of mismanaged school construction projects ensued.

Social Event

A discussion of a display about the SHA history project ensued

Quaker View

Dick Hobson reported that the new owner wants \$1.2 million for the property, but no meeting has been held with new owner. According to Dick Hobson, we need find out if Quaker View will make the priority list for open space protection. Bob Coulter reported that the city is having a real crisis in sports fields due to the T.C. Williams renovation.

Varsity Park Parking

A city ordinance is required for limiting overnight parking to those who have property tax stickers on their cars. The city would need to pass the ordinance and 65% of the homeowners need to approve for this to go forward. Several city council members support this position. Joe Gerard feels optimistic.

Episcopal High School

Laura Vetter reported that Episcopal High School plans to construct two new faculty houses and is currently negotiating with city regarding a perimeter of green space around the campus.

Fort Williams Parkway

Bob Coulter reported that the city will be offering more money for sidewalk extension. He credited Cindy Gurne for her work on this issue. Cindy says that some people are advocating the closing of Fort Williams Parkway at Duke Street.

The meeting adjourned at 9:13 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Laura Vetter
Secretary