

Seminary Hill Association, Inc.  
Minutes of the Board of Directors  
Meeting of March 16, 2006

**Call to Order**

The following members of the Board of Directors were present:

Jack Sullivan, President ad interim and Treasurer

Joanne Lepanto, Vice-President

Cindy Gurne, Communications Director and Area 4

Laura Vetter, Secretary and Episcopal High School

Lillian Patterson

Dick Hobson, Area 3

John Nottingham, Area 8

Charles Ablard, At-Large

Bruce McCarthy, At-Large

Mary Hix, Virginia Theological Seminary

Lisa Marie Cheney, SHA Representative to the Federation of Civic Associations

The President, Jack Sullivan, called the meeting called to order at 7:33PM

**Minutes**

The December minutes approved. The January minutes were approved with changes.

The February minutes (recorded by Dick Hobson) were approved with changes.

**Treasurer's Report**

In his capacity as Treasurer, Jack Sullivan reported \$50 deposit . He reported a balance of \$22,197.84. The Treasurer's report was accepted.

**Police Report**

Neither Sergeant Bartlett, nor Dick Hayes were present to report. Cindy Gurne inquired, who does one contact regarding graffiti Jack Sullivan responded that one would contact Sergeant Bartlett.

**Area Reports**

**Area 1**

Lillian Patterson reported nothing new to report. She did speak about the fire at site of TC Williams High School construction. She reported that despite the fire construction is proceeding on schedule.

**Area 3**

Dick Hobson reported that Cindy Gurne sent him a memo that Laura Durham of city staff had talked to the property owner (of the site at the intersection of Quaker Lane and Duke Street) learning that the owner is open to selling his property to the city for a pocket park.

**Area 4**

Cindy Gurne reported nothing new to report. She explained that there are ways to address overcrowding concerns. Cindy Gurne is exploring an Earth Day Clean-Up on Fort Williams Parkway. She may request a nominal amount of money from SHA to support this effort.

#### Area 7

Pat Lidy was not present to report. In her absence, Jack Sullivan reported on the redevelopment of Seminary Forest Apartments into Encore. The owner intends to build a clubhouse, where the swimming pool is currently located. The rents will be increased by 15-20%. Mr. Sullivan sees this as a positive development for the neighborhood. He also reported that the city has addressed the overcrowding at the house next to fire station on Seminary Road

#### Area 8

John Nottingham thanked SHA for their work in addressing the overcrowding at Wilson University. His neighbors are dissatisfied with the free newspaper the Examiner that is distributed to everyone whether they want it or not. The publisher is not responding to requests to discontinue delivery. Cindy Gurne followed-up expressing concerns about the problems with trash pick-up problem. Councilman Paul Smedberg is taking the lead on this issue.

#### Area 9

Bob Coulter was not present to report. The Area 9 representative was discussed. Bruce McCarthy will follow-up with Bob Coulter.

### **Program**

#### Discussion of city taxes

A hearing will be held before City Council on Saturday and Jack Sullivan is scheduled to speak.

Jack Sullivan introduced the subject and Lou Cordia.

Lou Cordia has explored the city's budget and how it differs from how individuals and families arrive at their own budgets. Last year, the city claimed that the city budget increased, due to cuts in state and federal funds, despite the fact that this was not the case. The city budget has increased by 8% for each of the last several years. Lou Cordia offered background on last year's efforts to reach a reasonable compromise on property taxes and the city budget. The announced city budget is an increase of 7% with an alternate budget with a 6% increase. Lou Cordia would like to see a 5% increase. Upon reviewing the budget, Lou Cordia found that the actual budget increase is 9.3%, not the announced 7%. Terms such as general fund (which excludes state and federal funds) and applying a previous surplus were utilized to make the increase look smaller. Mr. Cordia explored the differences in the announced budget, the all funds budget.

According to Mr. Cordia, the city will get \$10-20 million more than its approved budget through federal state funds, but city acts as if it does not receive these additional funds.

Lou Cordia would like the city to prepare a 3% budget to see how that looks. The staff prepares a negative 1% budget, which Lou Cordia would like revealed to the public.

90% of the staff receives merit pay, which compromises the point of merit pay. Mr. Cordia asked for the total cost of the city's big construction projects. According to him nobody really knows the total costs of the city's current and upcoming construction projects. He has received inconsistent numbers and it is not clear that the figures include all expenses. Lou believes that all budgetary options should be on the table, because every year the city's budget increases by 8%. Property tax bills have doubled since 2000, but some homeowners have had their tax bills double in as little as 3 years. 2 out of 3 houses assessments have increased by 20% or more in one year. His property tax bill has increased by 120% since 2000. Mr. Cordia urged everyone to participate in Saturday's hearing on the budget.

The board members thanked Lou Cordia for his efforts. When asked by City Council members what he wants to cut, Mr. Cordia explained that this not about cuts it is about containing growth. A 3% increase is still an increase, not a cut in the budget. Lisa Marie Cheney inquired about health care costs versus salaries for city employees. Jack Sullivan explained that several years ago, when budgets were flat, rather than giving the employees larger raises, as a compromise the healthcare plan was made non-contributory for city employees. Jack Sullivan said that Alexandria staff salaries are comparable to surrounding jurisdictions. Tom Perry explained the property tax increase is higher than the rate of inflation and salaries in our area. Tom Perry then gave an example of a property and the increase in assessed value.

Dick Hobson made the point that the property tax increases impact how long a person can afford to live in Alexandria and thus we lose good citizens. John Nottingham and Lou Cordia made the point that only 15% of city staff live in the city. Thus, the employees who provide our city services increasingly cannot afford to live in the city. Lou Cordia explained that the budget increases over the last several years have exceeded inflation. Cindy Gurne asked Lou about the Mayor's report that Alexandria is the only city represented at the conference that is not self-insured.

The All Sources budget is \$60 million more than the All Funds budget.

Mr. Sullivan reported on what he intends to say at Saturday's hearing.

Mr. Sullivan explained that every year the city has an excuse for the unrestrained budgets (i.e. not having a city manager on staff). The contradiction pointed out by Lou Cordia is that the assessed values of our properties increase, but incomes do not increase at that same amount. Dick Hobson believes that the city could obtain the authority to impose an income tax as an additional source of revenue and lower the property taxes. Lou Cordia believes that enough latitude exists to ease the burden on homeowners, by controlling control growth of city budget. Cindy Gurne raised the issue that the All Sports Facility as a line item, which could be cut. Lou Cordia listed some items, which could be cut from the budget. Lou Cordia is concerned that the TC Williams High School construction budget does not include everything (i.e. furniture, landscaping, and a parking garage). Mr. Cordia asked SHA to take the 3% position. Jack explained that we do not have quorum, so it cannot be voted on tonight, but we could vote on it at the April meeting.

According to Mr. Cordia, the petition will be distributed by hand and through the neighborhood associations. His goal is to obtain 5000 signatures. He expressed stronger language for the petition to hold city council responsible, but Ms. Lepanto expressed the concern that stronger language might make people less likely to sign the petition. Joanne asked if the Federation is working on this issue. Jack and Lisa Marie Cheney did not think so. Mr. Sullivan suggested that maybe we should pursue a 4% increase (the current inflation rate), rather than 3%.

#### Historic

Bruce McCarthy suggested that the Area Representatives could research, record and document the history of their areas. Charles Ablard elaborated that they are seeking information about the development of their areas (i.e. when developed and who the developer was).

#### Candidate Forum

Mr. Sullivan reported on the March 30th candidate forum to be held from 7-9PM at Patrick Henry School on Taney Avenue. Ms. Lepanto and Mr. McCarthy volunteered to distribute flyers for the forum. SHA is supporting a forum for the District B School Board candidates to be coordinated with the North Ridge Neighborhood Association on April 17 at the Methodist Church on Dominion Boulevard at Glebe Road. Unfortunately, another event for the school board will also be held on March 30th.

#### Outreach Activities

Mr. Sullivan thanked Ms. Gurne for producing labels of lapsed members. He will send out a letter to lapsed members.

Ms. Gurne has identified volunteers to verify the information to be included in the directory of SHA members. The entries will include name, address, phone number and SHA area. She would like to include SHA member profiles on the SHA website. A discussion ensued of how to draw people to the website.

Ms. Gurne explained that she believes SHA should produce and distribute a welcome letter addressing concerns and expectations regarding overcrowding, graffiti, etc. She also announced a March 25 event benefiting ALIVE.

#### Task Force Groups

The subject of Task Force Groups subject was introduced. Mr. Sullivan asked Ms. Gurne to share the list people, who have expressed interest in certain issues i.e. traffic, budget and environment.

#### New Business

Future Programs: Mr. Sullivan asked for suggestions for future meetings.

Next Meeting April 18th.

Announcements

Meeting adjourned at 9:16 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Laura Vetter  
Secretary