

**MINUTES**

**SRCA MEETING**

**April 7, 2022 – 7:30 PM by Zoom Conference Call**

**In attendance:**

Jeanne Jacob, President; Richie Weiblinger, First Vice President; Kate Hennigan, Second Vice President; Maria Browne, Treasurer; Susan Clark-Sestak, Secretary; Don Frahler, Immediate Past President; David Pritzker, Parliamentarian; Laura Plati, Chair SRCA Welcome Committee; Mike Brookbank, SRCA Historian; Beth Chase, St. Stephen’s and St. Agnes School (SSSAS) Liaison; Paul Judge, Seminary Hills Association (SHA) Liaison; Sgt. Tony Moore, Alexandria City Police Department (ACPD) Liaison; Lt. Lemuel Houston, Alexandria Sheriff’s Office Liaison; SRCA residents Patricia Evans, Janice Lachance, and Harriett McCune.

1. **Welcome and President’s Report – Jacob**
	1. Jacob called the meeting to order at 7:31 pm.
		1. Open mic session: There were no issues raised during the first open mic session.
	2. **Reports from SRCA’s ACPD Liaison/Alexandria’s Sheriff’s Liaison**
		1. Recalling the January SRCA discussion about check-washing incidents, Sgt. Moore reported that the post office box on Seminary Road has been under surveillance and they are actively trying to catch the person(s) responsible for stealing checks from the box and washing them.

Moore confirmed with SRCA that it had received the data on traffic citations issues on Seminary Road over the last 3 years. In response to a question of how accidents are “tracked” (i.e., what are included in police reports as accidents and what are not), Moore explained that data on a traffic accident is only collected if there is a report, not if the drivers simply exchange contact information.

* + 1. LT Houston explained that the Sheriff’s Office is going through an accreditation process known as the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). This process establishes metrics for a range of duties executed by the Sheriff’s Office and, for the first time, there is an opportunity for community engagement. On 12 April, 1:30-2:30pm there will be a public comment session via telephone, 229-269-1531. After the accreditation audit is completed, changes will be implemented. For additional information, he encouraged anyone with questions to contact Gail, 703-746-5027.

Houston also described some of the differing responsibilities between the Sheriff’s Office and the Police Department. The Sheriff is an elected official, based in the constitution of the state. It is associated with the courts system, oversees and facilitates the law enforcement function. It provides security for the courthouse, carries out liens and evictions, and such civil issues as temporary detention orders. The Police Department is founded on the basis of the City Council and executes law enforcement, such as warrants, patrols, traffic stops and collision investigations.

In response to a question, the staff of the Sheriff’s Office is less than 200, which is below its target. The main focus for additional hires is for the detention center and courthouse. Similar to Alexandria City Police, the Sheriff’s Office encounters challenges of hiring and training personnel, who then move to higher paying salaries elsewhere. Thus, the challenge is less a recruitment and more a retention issue.

1. **Secretary’s Report – Clark-Sestak**

**Approval of 3 March 2022 Minutes**

 Clark-Sestak expressed her appreciation to Jacob and Weiblinger for drafting the March minutes in her absence. She noted the need to make two changes to address typographical errors in the draft. **Brookbank moved to approve the minutes as modified; Hennigan seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved**.

 Clark-Sestak recommended that the 2022 SRCA budget, which was appended to the March minutes, be separated out and posted on the website’s document page. There was agreement on the utility of doing so.

1. **Treasurer’s Report – Browne**

 Browne reported that dues are continuing to trickle in. It is not clear why PayPal is indicating the SRCA account has been inactive; Browne will investigate this. Browne also noted that there is a $321.10 imbalance between the bank’s account and hers (the bank indicates a higher balance). She is continuing to look into this.

1. **SRCA Committee Chair Reports – Committee Chairs**
	1. **2022 Recent and Near-Term Events/Activities – Hennigan**

**St. Patrick’s Day**: Hennigan reported a number of favorable comments on the gathering and the desire to host this event again next year. She suggested better advertising (including preparation of a flyer) and someone with more expertise to select the Irish beers next year. The event came in within budget.

**Spring Clean Up**: Noting that 22 April is Earth Day, it was agreed to sponsor a Spring Clean Up on Saturday, 23 April, 9:00am until noon for the community’s public areas: the median strip along Fort Williams Parkway (from Seminary to Duke) and the island on Fort Worth Avenue. While the City has recently picked up many of the downed tree limbs, they still have missed some. There was agreement that the median strip looks much better since last fall’s clean up. While this is public property that the City is responsible for maintaining, it is unlikely to invest the resources in applying weed killer and general clean up. It was therefore decided to add $300 to the 2022 budget for hiring a contractor to pick up leaves, apply chemicals to kill the weeds, and potentially lay grass seed. Several members in attendance will solicit bids from lawn care companies. Those interested in participating, should bring a trash bag, yard waste bin, or wheelbarrow to return what it collected to individual homes and put the yard waste out with the next trash collection. This information will be posted on the website, as well as in a newsletter, with an additional suggestion that this could be a useful community service project for the younger residents of the neighborhood.

**Annual Yard Sale**: SRCA’s annual yard sale will be held 14 May, 8:00am until noon. There is no indication that the city will resume its “spring cleanup pickup,” but anything that does not sell during the yard sale could be donated to charity. Hennigan reported that she previously had arranged with a nonprofit group to pick up any unsold items and will do this again this year. Anyone wishing to participate must notify Hennigan (kate@bertlesrealestate.com) no later than 10 May to be included on the map of participating homes.

**Screen on the Green**: The first of two Screen on the Green movies will be scheduled for June and sponsored by Bertles Real Estate. Specific date and additional information will be determined at the May SRCA meeting.

* 1. **Home Sales in Seminary Ridge – Hennigan**

Hennigan reported two pending sales and one closing in the last 45 days. 4021 N. Garland was on the market for 5 days, listed for $924,900 and sold at $1,008,000. The two pending sales are 3605 Trinity Drive (listed at $915,000, 6 days on the market) and 4009 Harris Place went under contract off-market, but was listed at $1,025,000. A couple of other homes are expected to come on the market soon. While homes are still selling quickly, with the increase in interest rates, some buyers are being priced out of the competition.

* 1. **Seminary Hill Association (SHA) Liaison – Judge**

Judge highlighted Seminary Hill Association’s concerns with the city’s housing density plans. To fully understand the impetus for this and the other recent zoning changes in our city, it is helpful to go back to 2019 when the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments (COG) launched their Regional Housing Initiative to estimate the future housing needs of our region. Mayor Wilson was a member of the COG Board’s housing subcommittee that created and recommended the housing targets to the full COG Board.  The board adopted the COG goals that have the potential to significantly alter Alexandria.

Judge reported that City Council will have its first planning meeting with a goal of further increasing housing density and affordable housing. While, in theory, zoning for existing single occupancy homes will not be affected, residents are encouraged to review a 2020 memo prepared by City Staff about the push to increase density. This memo is posted on Seminaryridge.net on the “issues of interest page”; page 4 merits particular attention.

Judge also noted that on Saturday, 23 April, there will be a public hearing on the City’s budget.

* 1. **SSSAS (St. Stephen’s and St. Agnes School) Liaison – Chase**

Chase reported that the 29th annual Spring Fling girls’ lacrosse tournament will be on 9 April. The school will be closed on 15 April for Good Friday.

SSSAS will be celebrating its 2022 Alumni Reunion Weekend on campus 22-24 April.  The neighborhood should expect increased traffic and street parking on the evening of Friday, 22 April and during the day on 23 April.  School security will be onsite to help manage any crowds.

* 1. **BEHC Update – Jeremy Flachs**

Flachs was unable to attend the meeting, but had emailed an update on Beth El’s trees that border Karig Estates. Beth El was warned by the developer, Mr. Ibrahim, that soil scraping and grading for the new road would not only kill trees in that area on Karig’s side of the border, but would also likely kill Beth El’s trees.   Beth El hired an arborist, who wrote a report regarding what is necessary to save the trees.  However, the grading was complete by the time the report was received. The report has nevertheless been sent to City staff and the developer; no response has been received as of the date of the SRCA meeting.

* 1. **City of Alexandria Liaison – Weiblinger**

Weiblinger provided an updated about the promised City report on the **Seminary Road diet**. A report on bike usage, traffic safety, etc. was supposed to have been prepared 18 months after the completion of the Road Diet in late 2019. However, this assessment was delayed due to the impact of COVID on traffic patterns. It is now believed that more accurate traffic patterns can be obtained and the monitoring will occur during the month of May, with the analysis expected to the done in June. The scope of the analysis will include vehicle speeds, travel volumes, crashes, and travel times, as was originally presented to City Council in 2020. The project website will house the data collected and can already be accessed for additional information: https://www.alexandriava.gov/transportation-planning/seminary-road-complete-streets-project.

Weiblinger noted the staff’s desire to focus on data, while he is working with them to encourage not only a review of quantitative data, but also qualitative in the form of interviews with people directly impacted by the Road Diet. Indeed, SRCA might wish to provide written suggestions for items they should consider as part of their study in order to make it as effective as possible since our residents probably understand the traffic patterns of Seminary Rd better than anyone. Anyone who wishes to provide such input is encouraged to contact Weiblinger directly as soon as possible (rweiblinger@hotmail.com).

The consulting group working on **Strawberry Run** conducted three interviews with residents in March, as well as interviews with others on Taylor Run. The proposed course of action is to set up yet another committee to decide, together with City staff, what should be done, based on the alternatives that City staff present for consideration. While those interviewed pushed for removing the destructive elements of possible City plans, there was no commitment to do so, nor was there a willingness to include any residents from Strawberry Run on the new committee. There is thus a concern that the City will use the interviews conducted to date to say that it engaged with the public, but will still move forward with Natural Channel Design, which SRCA has repeatedly shown to have failed in this very area previously.

There was no new information to report on **Duke Street in Motion**.

* 1. **Welcome Committee for New Residents – Plati**

Plati reported that the only new residents are at 4021 N. Garland and they have been given a welcome packet.

It was confirmed that the welcome certificate to Great Harvest will now be for $15 rather than $10.

* 1. **Communications – Susan Clark-Sestak**

Clark-Sestak noted that the March meeting had raised a question about how often the seminary Ridge website is used. For 2021, there were over 1,200 hits on the site. At a cost of less than $260 annually to retain the site, which also provides the only consistent historical record for SRCA, it was agreed that continuing the website is well worthwhile.

Clark-Sestak explained that the annual fee for the website is due mid-April, for $216. The domain name annual fee was charged in March for $20. In other communications expenses for 2022, the Zoom account was renewed for another year in January at $122.91.

* 1. **SRCA Historian – Mike Brookbank**

Brookbank had nothing to report.

1. **Old Business – Jacob**

 Jacob explained that, while the City has come through to pick up the downed tree limbs on public areas, there were a number that the pick up missed. She also commented on the scale on trees located on Fort Williams Parkway, with some evidence this is spreading to trees on personal property. She has asked the City’s Urban Forest Manager for recommendations on any needed action.

 In response to concerns about the number of trees that had to be removed due to damage from the heavy winter snowstorm, the Urban Forest Manager has explained that it takes about a year for the ground to be ready for a new tree to be planted once a tree has been cut down. SRCA continues to work with him in ensuring the City offers several types of trees for planting on the public strips that will (eventually) provide a leafy canopy.

1. **New Business – Jacob**

**ACPS**: SRCA receives a quarterly report from resident Bill Pfister on Alexandria Public City Schools. While Pfister was unable to join this meeting, he provided the following updates, which are also uploaded on the “issues of interest” page of seminaryridge.net.

* **High School Project - Minnie Howard Campus:**ACPS just had the ceremonial groundbreaking, with substantial construction to begin in June 2022 and go through summer of 2024. Occupancy is planned for the start of the 2024-25 school year.
* **Douglas MacArthur Elementary School Rebuild:**Late stages of the construction of the subgrade parking garage are now being completed, and construction of the garage ramp retaining wall is beginning.  They will be pouring additional concrete footers.  They will also be bringing in a large crane, for the structural steel erection, which will be on site through July.  Substantial visible progress in the next few weeks / months should be expected.  Construction will continue through summer 2023, with occupancy for the start of the 2023-24 school year.  Most remediation of the “MacArthur on Taney” campus (building and lot demolished and converted to Patrick Henry fields) will begin in the fall of 2023 and will last the better part of the following year.

The **next SRCA Meeting** will be Thursday, 5 May 2022 at 7:30 pm on Zoom.

1. **Adjournment of SRCA Meeting – Jacob**

**Browne moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:10 pm; it was seconded by Brookbank and unanimously approved.**