

# MEETING MINUTES



Village of Homewood  
Community Relations Commission  
Minutes from March 1, 2021

Village Board Room  
2020 Chestnut  
Homewood, IL 60430

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## CALL TO ORDER:

Meeting called to order at 7:02PM, by Chairman Phil Kosanovich

**ROLL CALL:** The meeting was held via Zoom, due to shelter in place executive order. Members present were Phil Kosanovich, Heather O'Malley, Nancy Spaniak, Gianni Sansone, Shannon Olison, Troy O'Quin, Keith Harris, AJ Roundtree.

**In attendance from the Village Board:** Trustee Lauren Roman. Village Staff Liaisons in attendance, Allisa Opyd.

**Not in Attendance:** Andre Thames and Tom Hamilton.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** A motion was put forth by Spaniak to approve the January 4, 2021 minutes, Sansone second the motion.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:** There were no public comments.

## DISCUSSION ITEMS:

### A. Community Relations Committee Review

Chairperson Kosanovich recognized that Commission member Sansone had requested to read a statement he had prepared during tonight's Community Relations Commission meeting relative to the ongoing Planning and Zoning meetings with the developers representing the new owners of the former Calumet Country Club. He suggested this statement be read at the conclusion of the regular agenda items, and as such individual committee members personal updates would not be given due to time constraints.

### B. Village Update

Opyd reviewed the next iteration of the marketing campaign Jen Quirke created "Level Up". This next installment has the "Homewood Game" moving just as in a game. Unfortunately, Opyd was not able to share the screen on Zoom to show the ad. They can be seen in Chicago on the Mag Mile, Loop, Hyde Park, and Logan Square.

### C. Schedule Community Relations Committee Meetings:

- January 4
- February 1-cancelled
- March 1
- April 5
- May 3

- June 7
- July –No meeting
- August 2
- September 13
- October 4
- November 2
- December 6-To be determined based on Holiday Lights

#### D. **Home Tweet Homewood-Birding for Science**

The Homewood Business Association (HBA) presents Home Tweet Homewood Birding for Science as its annual community art installation. Participants can purchase a birdhouse to paint and donate for display in downtown Homewood this summer. The painted birdhouses will be auctioned in the fall with proceeds benefiting Homewood Science Center.

Purchase a birdhouse to paint at PopUpSCIENCE Shop, 2018 Ridge Rd Homewood, Saturdays 10 am - 1 pm, or by purchasing online at [homewoodsciencecenter.org](http://homewoodsciencecenter.org)

Cost: \$50 per birdhouse

#### TIMELINE

April 16: Deadline to purchase a birdhouse

May 14: Finish painting your birdhouse at home and then drop off at Homewood Auto Body for coating.

June 4 and 5: Reveal at Homewood Artisan Street Walk

June 7: Displayed in downtown Homewood

September 25: Birdhouse auction benefiting Homewood Science Center

#### E. **Restaurant Week-April 11-17**

The Homewood Business Association (HBA) has collaborated with The Village of Homewood for this delicious initiative. This is a great opportunity to support Homewood's unique, local restaurants, which were negatively impacted due to COVID mitigation plans. This is your opportunity to support local, independently owned restaurants.

Patrons can visit independently owned Homewood restaurants for value-price meals and specials.

This event will give participants an opportunity to experience all of Homewood's independently owned restaurants. Applies to dine-in and carry-out only and does not include orders from food delivery services.

#### F. **HAC Attack-Virtual Challenge**

The Homewood Arts Council sponsors this fun, safe game. There will be more information as to how the community can participate and possible the CRC as a team.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION** Commissioner Sansone was recognized, and following his prepared statement to the Commission, the Commissioners discussed the matter that took place on February 25 before the Planning and Zoning cross-examination meeting with the developers from Diversified Holdings, the new owners of land of the former Calumet Country Club.

## Background of Discussion:

Before the said meeting, on a “hot-mic”, the Director of Economic Development Angela Mesaros was heard, saying threatening comments about the public attending the meeting. Also, staff liaisons to the Community Relations Commission, Opyd and Quirke, and the Assistant Village Manager Napoleon Haney, were heard making offensive comments. An apology letter from the Village and Ms. Mesaros was released to the public, via the Village’s electronic newsletter.

Member Sansone asked to read a statement he had written to the group. This statement follows:

*On Thursday February 25th, immediately prior to a Planning and Zoning Committee Meeting, at least 4 employees of the village were engaged in conversation which included Napoleon Haney, Angela Mesaros, Jennifer Quirke, and Allisa Opyd. In brief, the topics of this conversation included calling members of the audience of previous meetings “assholes”, using the HPD to intimidate the attendees, and most of all about physically fighting the attendees.*

*Some quotes from that 4-minute conversation include:*

*“Text me, we can we can let the officers... what we want the officers to do is walk through the crowds, pretend like they are talking to you guys, and maybe look back at these guys” “... we have the heavy weights today”*

*“If this wasn’t here, I’d try to jump in the audience and fight someone”*

*“I’m very good with inciting violence with other people”*

*“I might be able to take on some of them”*

*“I can fight dirty with someone who is bigger than me”*

*“Allisa and I got you”*

*“Good thing Chris and I don’t have guns”*

*I hope we can all agree that these statements are reprehensible.*

*This conversation among employees of the village has me disgusted. This committee, including the employees, appointed citizens and elected trustees, are often the face of the village at the many events that are so loved by this community. We are tasked with building a community, fostering cohesion, and bringing people together. I believe too much trust between village and residents has been deeply eroded. This makes our duties near impossible to fulfill if the village does not act to heal that loss of trust. The conversation that can be heard in the recording in fact does the opposite of what I believe we stand for. What was said is hateful, fracturing, and divisive.*

*I did not attend most of the Planning and Zoning Committee Meetings in the past few weeks, but I have a little bit of an idea of what occurred. I will acknowledge that the behavior of some audience members was inappropriate. That should not be unexpected though. In fact, I was even kicked out of their Facebook group for previously defending trustees, employees, and members of committees as well as the fact that I am quote “too closely tied to the village” by being on this committee.*

*Emotions were high, as stated in the apology from Angela published on Friday evening. These individuals are understandably emotional as some live immediately across the street from the potential driveway that could see hundreds of trucks per day at any hour of the day. They are concerned over the added air pollution that comes with this type of development among the many other perceived or real changes they expect to their lives. But as employees preparing for*

*a public hearing, this was unexpected behavior of those recorded. All of our meetings are open to the public, but because the public rarely attends, does not mean they are not still accessible to the public. Public involvement is part of our government, and as public servants it is part of the job.*

*As a member of this committee, I feel we all bear some of the weight of this on our shoulders. That weight was put upon us by employees of this village. We do not have the authority to change or enforce any decisions made by the village, however this committee does have authority to make formal statements and recommendations to the board of trustees and the village president. It is my belief that one written apology from one employee is not sufficient.*

*So my question to this committee – do we want to deliberate and possibly make a formal statement to our trustees and village president?*

These are the comments made during the discussion. Comments that follow are from select committee members, and do not represent a committee consensus or Committee position:

Sansone then asked the committee if they, as part of the Community Relations Committee, should write a statement to the, Trustees, Village Manager, and the Village President, of the seriousness of the issue and disappointment in the content of the apology letter.

Members of the CRC spoke individually about Sansone's statement and members shared their opinions and concerns. These included:

- The apology letter was not made publicly enough, only have the release through the electronic newsletter and did not extend it through the Village's Facebook as well.
- The communications must improve to show the Village is taking the situation seriously.
- More information should be released about Haney's comments to use Homewood Police to intimidate people in the audience.
- Because the Community Relations Committee represents Homewood, individual Committee members agreed with Sansone a statement should be released from the committee to the Trustees, Village Manager, and the Village President.
- Individual members thought the issue should be reviewed by the Ethics Committee to determine the punishment of the employees.
- Individual members thought the statement made by Ms. Mesaros changed the perception of Homewood and the lack of strong communications by the Village, the Village's reputation has been damaged.
- Individual Committee members said that if changes were not made, they would have to resign from their position on the Community Relations Committee.

Committee Chair Kosanovich shared with the group that some years ago while working professionally on a development in another community and involved its subsequent related NIMBY conflicts, he too had been personally harassed and threatened. Kosanovich did not excuse the comments made but understood Ms. Mesaros frustrations from being threatened and taunted on social media and during the meetings.

Trustee Roman reviewed with the committee the role of the Planning and Zoning Board. The Board reviews the plans from developers when current zoning will be changed for a

development. The findings and recommendations are sent to the Village Board to vote if the project should move forward with the zoning changes.

Trustee Roman also reviewed how disciplinary actions are conducted by the Village Manager.

Select Committee members would like to re-evaluate the mission of the committee and determine how to do more with the entire community, work with neighborhoods and possibly have a sub-panel. Their opinion is that this committee should be more than just events.

NEXT MEETING: Monday, April 5, at 7:00PM

ADJOURNMENT: Spaniak put forth a motion to adjourn the meeting and Roundtree seconded the motion.

Respectfully submitted,  
Allisa Opyd