



**Helderberg Neighborhood Association
Meeting Minutes**

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Thursday, December 12, 2023

Sage College

Meet & Greet at 6:45 p.m.; Meeting at 7 p.m.

Attendees:

- Violetta De Rosa (HNA Chair)
- Hilary Papineau (HNA Vice Chair)
- Dannielle Carr (HNA Interim Treasurer)
- Julie Ruttan (Outreach & Communications, Chair)
- Shira Rosenhaft
- Jen Viggiani (HNA Secretary)
- Brian Borton
- Cyra Nealon
- Alexa Bontempo
- Patty Pierce
- Leslie Dykeman
- Judy Doeschate
- Keith Irish
- Barry Pendergrass
- Olga Tenney
- Ann Kutter
- Ann Shapiro
- Kim Alvarez
- Karen Dyer
- Dorcey Applys
- Lynne Lekakis (District 8 Albany County Legislator)

Board & Neighborhood Introductions. Violetta De Rosa welcomed everyone and led introductions around the room starting at 7:01 p.m..

Membership Meeting Minutes from Sept. 21, 2023: Violetta asked everyone to review the meeting minutes provided as a handout. Judy Doesschate asked if the Post Office is really coming back and what the documentation is on this status. Hilary Papineau offered that the understanding was provided by communication with Congressman Paul Tonko's office. Judy asked that **a link to the public plans for the US Post Office to remain located in the neighborhood environs**, be added to the meeting minutes.

<https://atlanticrotail.com/buildout-listings/890263-lease/>

Motion to accept the 9/21/23 HNA meeting minutes was made by Julie Ruttan; seconded by Dannielle Carr, by a majority present, with two abstentions. The motion passed.

Chair Update: Year in Review and Priorities & Events for 2024:

Violetta De Rosa presented a recap of the 2023 Events conducted and led by HNA; and provided a handout on "Upcoming 2024 Meetings & Events" that are summarized below.

Violetta said that 2023 was a good year for HNA with a strengthening of HNA's finances. She said the neighborhood organization has been in place since 1996, and she would like to see the HNA organization be sustainable for another 30 years.

Some new things for 2023 that were implemented was encouraging residents interested in the Yard Sale to sign up to become members of HNA in order to participate, and this definitely helped increase new membership. The HNA board continues to focus on the benefits of membership, for residents, and for businesses, and we would like to see more businesses become members.

HNA is 100% volunteers so the organization does what it can, and is always open to and welcoming volunteers to support the work. She noted that the Movie Night was a great success, and the several neighborhood cleanups also had great participation. HNA is back to doing events in person, and with that conviction, has resumed meeting in person regularly now back at Sage College, getting back to pre-Covid. Thank you to everyone who has come out in support of the neighborhood! It's a community effort for every initiative and event.

Violetta noted that HNA advocates for the neighborhood and works with the City to address any concerns or issues or needs for improvements.

HNA Chair Violetta De Rosa said the HNA priorities are to:

- HNA will work on doing more and different types of community building events and to reach more people;
- HNA is trending well on stabilizing its finances and this will continue to be a top priority; and,
- HNA will continue to focus on making sure the procedures and policies for HNA are in place and will help the organization with its smooth operations, sustainability and longevity.

For 2024, HNA will plan for the annual Movie Night (HNA pays for the movie licensing and reserves the location; and Christ Church pays for everything else including all the equipment. HNA will send out the date as soon as one is confirmed.

Spring Clean Up and Fall Clean Up will be held again this year. Spring Clean Up is usually around Earth Day in later April.

An HNA Picnic is not planned for the 2024 calendar as an event. The last few years during COVID the event had taken place at Woodlawn Park/Albany Babe Ruth area with food by Albany Police Department, with musicians and desserts provided by HNA, but the police-neighborhood engagement was light and so maybe it is time to switch it up.

One idea is to do an event/to engage with the Albany Fire Department next to the Bach Library, which is more centrally located in the neighborhood. Maybe we could do a “bake-off” or baking competition, or maybe even a pie-eating contest?

Kim Alvarez suggested a neighborhood cookbook could also be planned – as part of any baking event, to include and publish the recipes from such an event. #HNAEATS

Overit Media was mentioned as another potential partner/ or Rob Field Insurance, for more potential locations and partners for future events/neighborhood gatherings. The Albany Public Library is another partner and location to do some creative events together, offered Judy Doeschate.

The annual Yard Sale is planned for Sat. June 8, 2024; with a rain date of Sunday, June 9.

Membership Meetings Planned:

1. February 15, 2024
2. April 18, 2024
3. June 20, 2024
4. September 19, 2024

Annual Membership Meeting:

- December 2024

EVENTS Planned:

- Spring Clean-Up (Date TBD)
- Yard Sale: Saturday, June 8, 2024 with a Rain Date (Sunday, June 9, 2024)
- Movie Night (Date TBD)
- Fall Clean-Up (Date TBD)

If you have any ideas for an event or want to volunteer, please contact HNA at:

hna@hnaalbany.com

Businesses in the Neighborhood - News:

Violetta reported that Navona was tapping into Overit Media as an offsite location for New Year's Eve. Navona has closed at their New Scotland Avenue location otherwise, leaving room for Albany Ale & Oyster to move into the space in 2024. The former Albany Ale & Oyster space will be converted into a new restaurant concept. She said it was exciting that the commercial block remains solid. She noted that there are 2 vacancies along the block.

HNA Membership: If you haven't yet become a member of HNA, please consider doing so, or please renew your membership.

Treasurer's Report:

Dannielle Carr, Interim Treasurer, gave a brief financial report, stating that HNA has about \$2,000 currently. She is working on combining accounts to streamline HNA financial operations.

She said there are 90 members of HNA that are active/paid currently as of 12/12/23.

- To become a new member, or to renew your HNA membership, you can fill out a Membership Form online, and pay online. You can also write a check out to: Helderberg Neighborhood Association. For online, please go to www.hnaalbany.com, and click on **“Become a Member”**.

Dannielle reported that HNA is now a 501c3 not-for-profit organization. Any donations made for more than \$20 will receive a letter from HNA's Treasurer indicating the amount of donation for their tax records. Donations under \$20 will not receive acknowledgement.

For the proposed 2024 HNA Budget, Dannielle noted that the proposed budget is for \$1,500, and expenses were about \$1,500. She said that HNA would like to see an increase in income for 2024, with a goal to increase net income by \$400. The HNA income is from dues and donations.

Making a Donation to HNA: Another recommendation from Dannielle was to share with the whole neighborhood the opportunity for year-end giving, or any time of year giving, with the new 501c3 status for HNA.

- If anyone is interested in donating funds to HNA, people can write checks out to:
Helderberg Neighborhood Association.
- Checks can be given to the Treasurer, Danielle, in person at a meeting, or mailed via US Postal Service to:

**Helderberg Neighborhood Association
P.O. Box 8841
Albany, NY 12208-8841**

- To Donate any amount online to HNA, there is also a PayPal means of donating through the HNA website, www.hnaalbany.com, if you click on **“Donate”**.

Violetta De Rosa thanked Dannielle for working so hard to take on the role of Treasurer in 2023, to learn everything for this new role, and to streamline the accounts into one.

Review of Proposed Revised HNA Bylaws for the Membership to Consider:

Violetta De Rosa presented the proposed “Helderberg Neighborhood Association, Inc. Bylaws Revision November 11, 2023,” that were provided as a handout. The last time the bylaws were reviewed and revised was about 10 years ago. Violetta said the HNA Board met several times to review and revise the HNA Bylaws.

Violetta DeRosa noted that for 2024, the HNA annual dues will be as follows:

- Membership Dues will be \$10 per Household per year
- Associate Membership will be \$10 per year
- Business Membership will be \$20 per year

One of the proposed revisions to the bylaws is to clarify that dues will be for an annual basis, for January 1 of each new year and be good through December 31 of the same year.

Judy Doesschate offered edits that were not material in nature but clarifications for consideration:

- Under Article IV: Meetings, Section 1: Annual Meeting: the following revision was made:

“The board shall provide a summary of the fiscal year’s activities, ~~elect members to the Board of Directors,~~ and the Treasurer or other HNA Board of Director shall present the financial report. **Members in good standing shall elect the Board of Directors.**”

- Under Article VII: Officers, Section 1: Officers: the following revision was made:

“All such officers must be duly elected ~~from among voting members of the Board of Directors~~ **by the membership and shall constitute voting members of the Board of Directors.**” (Note: Officers are the Board of Directors.)

- Under Article VII: Officers, Section 7: Duties of the Treasurer: the following revision was made:

“The Treasurer shall be responsible for: prompt deposit of all receipts, **checking account**, an accurate **written** accounting of income and expenditures, and shall present a written financial report **at least quarterly** to the Board of Directors, **and**, on request, and at the Annual Meeting. **All expenditures shall be approved in advance by the Board or by the Chair with ratification by the Board at the next Board meeting.**”

The Helderberg Neighborhood Association, Inc. Bylaws Revision November 11, 2023 as amended with revisions at the meeting on December 12, 2023 were moved to a vote, with the motion by Judy Doesschate; and seconded by Brian Borton. More than 10 active members of HNA were at the meeting. The HNA Bylaws as revised were approved by majority.

Board Member Election:

The 2024 slate for HNA Board Members:

- Violetta De Rosa, Chair
- Shira Rosenhaft, Vice Chair
- Jen Viggiani, Secretary
- Dannielle Carr, Treasurer
- Julie Ruttan, Outreach & Communications, Chair

Violetta De Rosa recognized the amazing contributions made by Hilary Papineau who is stepping down after roles previously as Chair, and most recently, as Vice Chair, and thanked her for all of her work and initiative. Violetta said Hilary contributed so much to guide HNA through COVID and how much her strength and perseverance to keep HNA going through the past few years especially, has been appreciated.

The above slate was read, and voted upon by HNA members at the meeting:

A motion to elect the 2024 HNA Board Member slate as noted above was made by Hilary Papineau. Seconded by Leslie Dykeman. The motion passed and the 2024 HNA slate was approved.

Shira Rosenhaft, the newly elected Vice Chair, said that if HNA members would like to get more involved there are always volunteers needed to be neighborhood block ambassadors. Please reach out to an HNA board member if interested.

Elected Officials / Community Conversation:

Dr. Dorcey Applrys, City of Albany's Chief City Auditor, Office of Audit & Control, reported that College of St. Rose announced permanent closure would be at the end of the 2023-24 academic year. City Auditor Applrys reported fact-finding is underway with St. Rose leadership to support students, faculty, staff and to look into the future of the portfolio of nearly 90 properties owned by St. Rose in the Pine Hills extending from Madison Avenue to Western Avenue. There are a lot of ideas such as conversion to senior housing, and there have been conversations with other academic institutions and colleges.

She also noted that she and her office have conducted an **Equity Audit** of the City of Albany that is about to be submitted to the city administration.

As per questions about **59 Lawnridge**, a vacant home in the neighborhood, Auditor Applys reported an update from Meghan Keegan, Albany City Council: this property has been to court; is on the Vacant Building Registry; is bank-owned; and is being maintained.

Julie Ruttan asked about **21 Lawnridge** - which is also vacant and identified that this property may be even more of a nuisance than 59 Lawnridge, as there had been water pipes that had broken and reportedly flooded a neighbor's property. County Legislator Lynne Lekakis said she would look into 21 Lawnridge.

Julie also noted **135 Grove Avenue** is also an abandoned property, reportedly bank-owned.

Neighbors on Ramsey alerted everyone to **49 Ramsey Place** as another vacant property of neighborhood concern. They understood it to be potentially an underwater - reverse mortgage property. They would appreciate follow-up on the status of this property as well.

It was reported that there are about 900 vacant properties in the City of Albany currently. Kim Alvarez said she thinks the number is higher than when the mayor was first elected. She understands that about 50 to 75 buildings are demolished every year by the city. Some quick online searching was done: and Lynne Lekakis reported that in 2018 the number was 1,044 vacant buildings. In 2023 the number listed was 944. *(Secretary's note: these numbers in this paragraph were discussed anecdotally during the meeting and are for reference only.)*

It was further noted that a former City Auditor did an audit of the Vacant Building Registry. It was also suggested that Samuel Wells, Neighborhood Stabilization Coordinator be invited to a future HNA meeting to report on the vacant buildings topic for the city and the neighborhood.

Lynne Lekakis, Albany County Legislator, Albany County Legislature District 8, gave a brief county legislator report.

- She reported work done on a Blight to Betterment Task Force.
- She also noted that in the Delaware Avenue neighborhood of the city, that neighbors proactively created a corporation among neighbors to buy property and to revitalize it, referring to the Chocolate Gecko, using Housing Trust Fund support.

After Legislator Lekakis' report, a concerned resident raised concern about the City of Albany's consideration of plans to fluoridate the public drinking water supply, and offered to share more information, in advance of a future City Council vote, reported as being led by Councilman Tom Hoey, 15th Ward. Violetta DeRosa noted that discussion is welcome, but just reminded that the HNA is not political and won't take sides on the issue. City Auditor Applyrs added some background, noting that neighboring towns in Albany County have been fluoridating water supply for years, and that the CDC recommends the practice for public dental health. She had worked closely with Dr. Elizabeth Whalen, the former Albany County Health Commissioner, on the County Board of Health, who has advocated for the City of Albany to fluoridate its water supply. The issue of dental health is a health equity issue for consideration. The resident concerned about fluoridation said that there are health effects not being considered by the City, County, and CDC, and encouraged residents to become more informed.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Violetta DeRosa; seconded by Hilary Papineau.
Meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Helderberg Neighborhood Association (HNA) Contact Information:

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