

President's Letter  
Hermitage Road Historic District Association  
September 9, 2020



Dear Neighbors:

A lot has happened since I sent my last President's Letter in June. I hope to bring you up to date on activities of the Association and the Executive Board to minimize the time we need to spend on Old Business in the upcoming September 18 Business meeting of the Hermitage Road Historic District Association.

### OLD BUSINESS

**Minutes of the June Business Meeting:** The main annual business meeting of the Association was held via Zoom on June 19. I was very pleased that 17 of us participated in the meeting; thanks for attending. Minutes of the meeting were prepared by Secretary Cheryl Magazine and distributed to the membership on August 25. These minutes included a note describing the special business meeting that we held on June 27 to discuss the AP Hill Monument. That Zoom meeting too was well attended.

**Election:** At the June Business meeting we reelected our current slate of officers, who are Bob Balster, President; Michael Kurze, Vice-President; Frank Rizzo, Treasurer and Cheryl Magazine, Secretary. These officers along with Celia Sease, Past-President, serve as the Executive Board. The Executive Board has been very busy with email discussions of matters arising for the Association.

**Treasury:** Treasurer Frank Rizzo will provide an update on the treasury balance at the September business meeting. Members were pretty good about paying their 2019-2020 dues this year, including several who paid a special assessment to help restore the Association resources. Dues for 2020-2021 were due September 1, so if you have not sent them in yet, a dues payment form is appended to this letter.

**By-Laws Revisions:** At the June 19 Business Meeting we adopted a By-Laws revision that adds a new nonvoting Associate Member category for persons who rent properties in the District. The dues form reflects this new membership category. If anyone wants to have the new set of by-Laws, let me know.

**Sale of 4002 Hermitage Road.** The property at this address, most recently occupied as a place of business for Regal Home Improvement, has been up for auction. The auction has been postponed twice, and the next one is scheduled for September 17 at noon, the day before our next business meeting. Although the property is zoned R1, it has a Special Use Permit allowing the main house to be used as an office. In December 2019 the HRHDA wrote to the realtor for the property expressing "strong support for the sale of this property for future use as a single-family dwelling." Many in the Association believe that the property has been abandoned, both as a residence and a place of business, for at least two years. The Special Use Permit for the property states that the permit becomes null and void if the "premises is abandoned for a period of twenty-four consecutive months." Therefore, on August 27, the Association submitted a Request for a Letter of Zoning Confirmation seeking to determine if the Special Use Permit remains valid and would move with the sale of the property to the new owner. Regardless if the property is used as a residence or an office, it still resides in the Historic District and any changes visible from the street, and any signage, will need to be approved by the Commission on Architectural Review.

**Traffic calming.** Under the leadership of Michael Kurze, the HRHDA submitted a petition on July 10 for a traffic calming study to be undertaken by the Department of Traffic Engineering for the city. Receipt of the petition was acknowledged. Michael will let us know at the business meeting if there is any update on this. Thanks Michael for all your work!

**Richmond 300 Planning.** The HRHDA is monitoring the Richmond 300 Guide for Growth being developed for the city <http://www.richmond300.com/>. This is a major effort for establishing a master plan for the city. There are numerous ways this effort could have an impact on the Hermitage Road Historic District, including changes in the land use definitions to allow more properties to have a multifamily use. As a result of comments we submitted during the process, the new draft plan, released in June, seems to have addressed most of our concerns. Several representatives of the Richmond 300 planning process, including the city Director of the Department of Planning and Development Review, Mark Olinger, met with Association members via Zoom on July 7 to give us an overview and discuss the plan. They came well prepared to talk about the implications for the Hermitage Road Historic District. I thought it was an excellent meeting. The comment period on the draft plan is now over and we await the final product. I highly recommend checking out the Richmond 300 website for several streamed presentations that address issues of important to the District.

**Thirteen Acres School.** After the temporary closure of Holton School there had been a noticeable uptick in vandalism and dangerous behaviors in and around the Thirteen Acres School property at 3801 Hermitage Road. On May 19 I wrote a letter for the Association to our School Board representative Kenya Gibson, which generated significant discussion, especially after the letter was posted to the Nextdoor community discussion board. Significant improvement was made to the property within a few weeks, and it looks much better and more secure now. School Board members Kenya Gibson and Jonathan Young joined us via Zoom for the June 19 business meeting. More details on the meeting content is provided in the Minutes of that meeting. I believe we communicated effectively our interest in coming to a long-term resolution to the problem of that abandoned building.

## NEW BUSINESS

**November Elections:** As you know, national and local elections are being held on November 3. Of special importance to the Hermitage Road Historic District is the election for 3<sup>rd</sup> district city councilperson. The winner will replace Chris Hilbert who is not running for reelection. To help our members learn more about the candidates for this race, I have invited three of them to participate in our next business meeting. I have assigned each of them a specific 15-minute time slot, so its important that we stick with the schedule. Three candidates have agreed to participate. Not only is this a good way for us to learn more about the candidates, it is a chance for the eventual winner to learn about our association. I hope to have a good attendance so we can make a good impression. If there is an interest in arranging similar Zoom meetings with candidates for other office, e.g. school board or mayor, I can try to do so.

**Sale of 4201 Hermitage:** At the business meeting in June Nancy Foy from the New Community School announced that the school was purchasing the home at 4201 Hermitage Road. Nancy will update us on plans for this property at the September Business Meeting.

**Newsletter Editor:** After many years of editing our newsletter, the *Hermitage Herald*, Hilda Braswell has stepped down. Hilda did a fabulous job. Please join me in thanking Hilda for her efforts ([brashweb@comcast.net](mailto:brashweb@comcast.net)). The Association is seeking a new newsletter editor. Please let me know if you are interested. Until we get the editor position filled, I will distribute my President's Letter, which would normally appear in the newsletter, as a standalone document for the members.

**Intersection gardens in the medium:** Although the city takes responsibility for mowing the grass and trimming the trees in the medium strip of Hermitage Road, they do not take care of the small garden beds that are to be found at most intersections. In the past, HRHDA members have volunteered to tend to these gardens, but it has been a long time since we discussed this and reviewed the gardening assignments. Hopefully we can revisit this issue in the next meeting.

**RVA311:** The city has an online system for reporting requests for city services, such as streetlight and sidewalk repair (<http://rva311.com>). I see that this reporting system seems to be working effectively to get needed work done in the Hermitage Road Historic District. I urge you to report problems using this mechanism.

**Next Meeting:** The next HRHD Association meeting will be held via Zoom from 6-7:30 pm on September 18. Michael Kurze has kindly agreed to set up and host the meeting. Please contact him if you have any questions about how to use Zoom ([mkurze@verizon.net](mailto:mkurze@verizon.net)). Here is the meeting link and login information:

Join Zoom Meeting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89785037018>

Meeting ID: 897 8503 7018

Dial in is 1-646-558-8656, 89785037018#

I hope you will participate in the next meeting. I will send an agenda soon.

Respectfully,

*Bob Balster*

