

August 14, 2021

Dear Kathi Clayton, Chestnut Hill Community Association President

I am writing to you about the fifty-one voters, 10% of those who cast votes, whose ballots were rejected in the recent CHCA election.

Here's background you are likely familiar with:

From the Chestnut Hill Local, August 5<sup>th</sup> edition

“The annual Chestnut Hill Community Association board elections announced the results on Tuesday, July 27...There were 462 votes cast, over twice the standard. (513 ballots were turned in, with 51 rejected as invalid.) “

From John Derr, Local Publisher

“This election was the most transparent verification and tabulation I have ever seen. There were observers from slate and non-slate candidates present the whole time. The counting took three days because of the number of votes and the care and caution that was taken with each vote. There were no complaints and no disputes... We did look into the fifty-one votes. Either people who were not actually valid members voted or ones whose memberships had expired voted so they were not counted.”

Let's assume that there was no fraudulent voting, that everybody who submitted a ballot believed they were members in good standing when, in fact, fifty-one of them were not.

If I were one of the fifty-one people who took the time and effort to critically review the candidates' credentials and platforms and then submit a ballot, I would be disappointed to learn my ballot had been rejected. But, I would definitely like to know about it.

Perhaps you can reach out to these fifty-one people and say you are sorry their ballots couldn't be accepted because they were not active members and encourage them to initiate or renew their memberships.

Thank you for your work on behalf of the community.

Brian Rudnick  
<http://closeup.brianrudnick.com>

. This year produced a higher level of community involvement and a wider range of views among the nominees. Last year, eight candidates ran unopposed. This year, there were 16 candidates for nine seats.

The nine “Slate” candidates all won, with Beth Wright getting the highest vote total of all 16 candidates. Since two of the candidates were being reelected – Tony Banks, VP of Operations for the CHCA, and Keith Kunz, Member at Large – this means seven new board members, an unusually high number in one election cycle. There are 24 seats on the board. Three are institutional representatives from Chestnut Hill Hospital, Woodmere Art Museum, and the Chestnut Hill Parking Foundation.

The “Slate” refers to a self-description in an open letter [published in the Local on July 15](#), in which they stated their goals included “developing a set of best practices and a set of specific standards for new development by applying appropriate resources to support strategic planning. We will invite community members to join the process and create a robust dialogue.”

Zoning and development were a strong incentive for many of the new candidates, as the normal issues about preserving the Chestnut Hill style had been magnified by new property developments since this time last year. A proposal for replacing an office building at 30 W. Highland with townhouses had led to the creation of a neighborhood group to represent opposition; many of these candidates had become involved through this. Some of these projects were spurred by rising real estate prices and incentives for developers, though some were caused by changes in the business environment brought by economic conditions. While some of these issues showed the CHCA working with the neighbors, in some cases there was concern about transparency in the process, in particular on recommendations for zoning variances.

Beth Wright had been active with 30 W. Highland Neighbors, along with newly elected members Tim Breslin and Ross Pilling. She felt the development at 30 West was a turning point, with the Board not being responsive to the neighbors, or at least a lack of transparency creating that perception. “We want to work with every member of the board to move our ideas forward,” she said. She expects the general goals to be generally acceptable, but then the details need to be worked out. For instance, she’d like to see fewer decisions solely by architects and more input by preservationists and land-use experts “to support a broader vision for development initiatives in our community.” She emphasized the goal was to broaden the involvement in the decisions, including more community attendance at the hearings, or communication about the decisions. “We lead a positive campaign. Ideas matter. Goals matter. We hope that, in the end, it’s not about any one of us, but about using the platform that we presented as a guidepost for making Chestnut Hill an even better place.”

There were 462 votes cast, over twice the standard. (fifty-one<sup>3</sup> ballots were turned in, with fifty-one rejected as invalid.) The voting results were expected to be announced by the Monday after the voting closed July 22, but because of the large number the results were not final until July 27.

Kathi Clayton, President of the CHCA, said in a statement: “This year's CHCA Board election was outstanding. It was heartening and gratifying to witness the significant voter turnout of our membership.

“All the candidates' qualifications and commitment to volunteering their time and expertise on behalf of the community at large are impressive. They all share an appreciation for Chestnut Hill and believe the CHCA is of significant value to its members and residents.