MINUTES OF
REGULAR MEETING OF
THE NEIGHBORHOOD CLUB OF BALA CYNWYD ("NCBC")

May 5, 2026

Attendees: Kay Sickles, Juan Rodriguez, Vanessa Coke Cohen, Bryan Capone, Jillian Dierks, Maxine Goldberg, David Haas, Joe Hirsch, Margaret Hunting, Sandy Kornhauser, Brian McGuire, Roger Moog, Randy Myer, Mark Prudente

Absent: Jason Landau Goodman, Aaron Gross, Bill Krebs, Dan Russoniello, Marion Williams, Merle Zucker

Elected Officials Present:
Commissioners Gilda Kramer, Louis Rossman and Jeremiah Woodring

Kay Sickles, President, called the meeting to order at 7:32 pm.

POLICE REPORT

Office Alex Halstead (ahalstead@lowermerion.org) reported that stolen cars in the township continue to be an issue. He advised residents to lock their cars and take their keys inside (especially since 90% of the cars stolen have their keys in the car). Additionally, Officer Halstead discussed the focus on increased enforcement of eBikes (that are not pedal assist) on the roads and sidewalks. Any motorized vehicle using the Township's roadways need to be registered and insured and the drivers of such vehicles must be licensed. Any motorized vehicles that violate these rules will be impounded and the driver ticketed.

Jilian Dierks noted that it would be helpful to communicate to residents the difference among motorized vehicles and ebikes and the corresponding regulations governing each.

ELECTED OFFICIALS REPORT

Commissioner Jeremiah Woodring reported that the Township budget priorities are listed on the March 25, 2026 agenda and encouraged residents to review them if they want to weigh in with their commissioners. He also stated that on June 10, 2026 Township engineers should be providing their recommendations (not definitive actions) based on their review of the recent traffic study. The Bala Ave amendments were pushed off for a month and the Planning and Commission meeting is planned for June 1, 2026 for further consideration of the amendments. On June 24, 2026, there will be a Capital Improvement Projects workshop to set the Township's agenda for future projects.

Commissioner Louis Rossman reported that he was pleased with his tour of the new apartment complex (the Blayr) at the Bala Shopping Center. He noted that the developers of the in-process Hanover apartment building were grateful for NCBC's support for the sign variance. Cmr. Rossman mentioned that the PALM Center has reopened with renovations. Lastly, he confirmed that the Township did not have official word from PennDot about the St. Asaph's/Belmont Ave intersection improvements, but it was still likely to be a traffic light change.

Commissioner Gilda Kramer reported that the Gratz College renovations should be completed by mid-July. She said that she toured the facility and that the new space will include a operate as a community

center and include a café, workspace, two theaters, teen space, and hologram history (holocaust). Cmr. Kramer noted that the space will be good for movie nights and hosting events and will remain an election location.

FEDERATION OF CIVICS REPORT

Margaret Hunting provided an update from the April 2026 meeting of the Federation of Civics. She reported that a representative from the Delaware Valley Region Planning Committee spoke about a long range plan for region (roads, congestion, environmental issues, public transport). She also noted that Lower Merion School Board members presented a report about their 5yr strategic plan and finances for the District.

PRESENTATION: The Shtiebel Application (Revised) to Expand Use of the Kohelet Yeshiva High School by Naomi Zwillenberg, Andrew Carras, and Kallie Melchir

Naomi Zwillenberg presented the Shtiebel's request for its expanded use of the Kohelet Yeshiva High School. The Shtiebel is a place where local neighbors can come for prayers and services, however they have no intention of appealing to people outside of the neighborhood. The Shtiebel plans to use the property as is and is not requesting any modifications to the property. Their prayers and services will not overlap with Kohelet's school services; will be on 8:30am – 1pm on Saturdays, Sabbath evenings (less than 1.5hrs) and holiday services 13x a year.

In response to neighbors requests, the Shtiebel modified their original plans to remove daily services and prayers, slichot services and family life celebrations. Also, the operations and compliance plan that township approved includes a no driving rule, attendance management, indoor activity only, community communication and township coordination. They expect minimal impact on parking for the neighborhood.

Joe Hirsch queried whether the Kohelet/Shtiebel will allow attendees to drive and park overnight in the neighborhood before Shabbat services. Ms. Zwillenberg said that they will tell their members not to drive and a security guard will be onsite to turn any drivers away. A concern was raised about drivers trying to navigate an increased number of pedestrians in the neighborhood, but Ms. Zwillenberg noted that there is currently a lot of crossover for pedestrian traffic with the Lower Merion Synagogue.

Their conditional use request that they plan to present to the May 14 conditional use hearing is:
Sat Morn 8:30 – 1pm up to 200 people (current is 90 people); no driving
Sat eve and Fri eve added, no driving, 1.5hours in duration
Up to 13 holidays a year (up from 3-4); 200-300 people, no driving

After a discussion among the Board, Joe Hirsch made the motion that the NCBC not oppose the Shteibel's proposed conditional use application. Roger Moog second. All in favor. No oppositions. No abstentions.

DISCUSSION: Proposed Bala Zoning Amendment

Re: *Introduction of religious uses to Bala Ave and adjustment of ground floor use, removing retail requirement*

Bala Cynwyd Resident Barry Polis spoke and stated his opposition to the proposed amendment change because he feels retail is essential to the revitalization of Bala Ave.

With respect the proposed removal of the ground floor requirement for development along Bala Avenue, the concern is that the removal of the requirement would add more apartments to the corridor and move away from the retail driven goal. Directors raised the issue that the design of the retail spaces as currently existing and proposed are not desirable. Guidance should be provided by the Township to developers with respect to the desired ceiling heights and retail footprints that business owners would like to bring their services to Bala Ave.

Brian McGuire made a motion that the NCBC not support the draft amendment to the Bala Village ordinance which would make ground commercial/retail optional. Joe Hirsch seconded. All in favor. No objections or abstentions.

With respect to the religious use amendment to the existing ordinance for Bala Ave Village, Jillian Dierks suggested that that Bala Ave should be held to the same standards as other villages (Gladwyne/ Bryn Mawr) by using the special exception procedure. Brian McGuire provided an alternative position and said that the bar for having decisions made through conditional use is very high, so that procedure is preferable (decisions have to be approved by the Board of Commissioners as opposed to the zoning board). Brian McGuire suggested that the NCBC can be supportive of an amendment regarding religious uses if it comes under conditional use, but the amendment as proposed, no.

Jilian Dierks made a motion that the draft amendments to the Bala Ave Village ordinace with respect to religious use is not supported by the NCBC, however if certain issues (signage, parking, ancillary uses, impact to commercial activity) can be addressed through conditional use provisions, then NCBC can support the amendment (as revised). Joe Hirsch seconded. All in favor. No oppositions or abstentions.

EXECUTIVE REPORTS

President's Report: Kay Sickles reported that former Director Jim Remsen gave an historical presentation last month and that the community was grateful for the information. She also reported that the NCBC's movie night had a great turnout of about 70 people.

Treasurer's Report: None.

Secretary's Report: Vanessa Coke Cohen noted that the April 2026 meeting minutes had been previously distributed for review by the Board. Brian McGuire made a motion to approve the minutes. Kay Sickles seconded. All were in favor with no oppositions or abstentions.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Vanessa Coke Cohen reported that the NCBC has 190 members, which is much lower than previous years. She noted that the NCBC is doing more than ever to raise exposure within the community (historical presentations, movie nights, social media presence, farmers market) and yet membership continues to dwindle. Paying for membership is easier than ever through Zeffy (apple pay and credit cards accepted without fees). She encouraged board members to continue spreading the word about NCBC.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE

No report given.

JULY 4th COMMITTEE

Kay Sickles reported that she has been handling the photography, parade, coordinating sponsorships and she needs help with the rest of the event. She noted that Maria Wells obtained all of the vendors. She also encouraged all of the directors to consider making a donation for the July 4th event.

The Directors also confirmed the following:

Merchant of the year: The Landing Kitchen
Citizen of the Year: Anne Greenhalgh

NEW BUSINESS

None.

The next Regular Meeting is scheduled for June 2, 2026 at 7:30 pm at the Union Fire House and via Zoom. The meeting was adjourned at 9:39pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Vanessa E. Coke Cohen, Secretary