

The Heritage Hill Association's
2016 Report to Neighbors

"The purpose of the Heritage Hill Association is to provide neighbors a way of collectively building a healthy, historically preserved community in which people can live and work in a secure and stable environment."

WHO WE ARE:

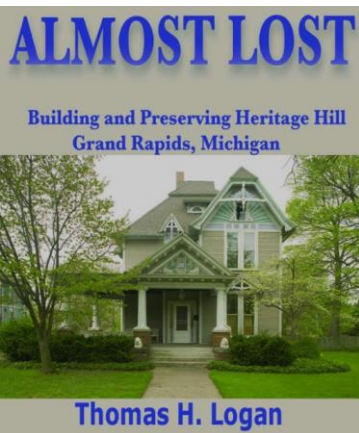
The **Heritage Hill Association** is the neighborhood organization of the Heritage Hill Historic District. Our boundaries are the northern rear property lines of Crescent Street to the southern rear property lines of Pleasant Street (including the 600 block of Union SE); the eastern property lines of Union Avenue to the western property lines of Lafayette Avenue; also included is a jog down State Street to Jefferson Avenue to Fulton Street. **Everyone who lives within these boundaries is a member of the Heritage Hill Association.** Non-residents can also be members by contributing annual membership dues. **Resident neighbors and businesses are encouraged to support the work of the Association through its annual pledge drive.**

Population Stats: There are **1,300 Heritage Hill structures** that are occupied by **3,467 households** per the 2010 U.S. census. The total population is 4,103 and that averages to 1.2 people per household. Of the total population, 81% are Caucasian, 9% are African American, 4% are Hispanic or Latino, 2% are Asian, the remaining 4% are mixed races; 70% are tenants and 30% are owners (Heritage Hill has the largest concentration of rental opportunities in the city of Grand Rapids) 64% are our residents are moderate to low income; 66% of our structures are either owner occupied or neighbor owned and 34% are absentee-owned. The concentration or density of our housing is over twice the GR average; 19% of our households do not own cars (this trend is growing as residents seek out non-auto alternatives; walking, public transportation, bikes).

The Association's Programs: Heritage Hill is an urban neighborhood and the Association's programs inform, assist and work with neighbors to **address urban problems** -- neighborhood safety, land use conflicts, increasing traffic and parking demands, institutional expansion/construction containment, housing and preservation issues, promotion of neighborhood schools, access to services, and other issues inherent in a densely populated, core city neighborhood. Just as with old houses, a neighborhood is dependent on a good and ongoing maintenance program!

Active, engaged, and mobilized neighbors, working with our neighborhood institutions, the City of Grand Rapids, and all respective community resources, are the best indicators that Heritage Hill is a vital place to live and work. (***Please be engaged! Email us your email address at heritage@heritagehillweb.org***)

Heritage Hill is recognized by the American Planning Association as **A Great Place in America**. *This Old House* magazine has named Heritage Hill as one of the **Best Neighborhoods in the United States**.



A LITTLE HISTORY:

In 1968, neighbors organized together to stop mortgage red lining (banks would not loan money to buy a house in Heritage Hill) and urban renewal plans that would have demolished over 75% of Heritage Hill structures. The first goal of the Heritage Hill Association was to block the bulldozers. Neighbors worked diligently to invoke national preservation legislation that put Heritage Hill on the National Register of Historic Places. This stopped the demolitions and set a precedent throughout the U.S. that is still cited today. In 1988, the Association was the first Grand Rapids neighborhood to establish its own Master Plan of Heritage Hill. Today this plan continues to be updated and guides the Association and the City regarding life in the neighborhood. A 200-300 Prospect

Plan, the State Street Corridor Area Specific Plan, and the 50 College SE development report are additional planning guidelines developed by the Association and neighbors.

OUR SERVICES:

The Crime Prevention Program is provided to increase neighborhood safety with services that activate neighbors in **Neighborhood Watch, Drug Watch, and Block Club Organizing**. Key components include free home security surveys, personal safety information, victim assistance, and producing and distributing crime information/alert/e-alert notices and fliers. Block Club organizing keeps neighbors working together to prioritize problems, identify resources, and develop and implement action plans to resolve problems. In 2016, this program was primarily funded by federal Community Development Block Grants that the **City of Grand Rapids** receives and in turn funds a myriad of community programs, one being the Heritage Hill Association.



Neighborhood Improvement Program addresses all the other quality of life issues that are not crime related. Its purpose is to generate resident involvement, educate and train, and encourage leadership to preserve, protect, and maintain the residential qualities and bridge commercial development of Heritage Hill; to resolve issues of concern; and build upon neighborhood strengths that improve the quality of life in the neighborhood. Issues commonly include land use conflicts, traffic/parking struggles, institutional expansion, promoting neighborhood schools, etc. Additional components consist of educating, referring and assisting residents with available City services and community resources

and implementing and re-evaluating needs identified in the **Master Plan of Heritage Hill**. Like the crime prevention program, this program is partially funded by the federal **Community Development Block Grant** funds that the **City of Grand Rapids** awards to the Heritage Hill Association's program.

Neighbors cheer the "righting of the wrong" at GRPS' demo ground breaking at 11 College SE.



A new house grows on Pleasant SE – Welcome!

Apartment and Homes Listing Service: Due to our **large rental community**, the Association produces and publishes a list of available apartments in Heritage Hill whose landlords choose to list with us. It is an extremely popular service and Heritage Hill apartments are in demand. Our list is free to tenants and available on our Web site (www.heritagehillweb.org) and at the HHA office. To list an apartment, landlords pay a fee: \$45 for a studio apartment; \$50 for a one-bedroom; \$55 for a two-bedroom and \$60 for 3 or more bedrooms. The listing is for 2 months or until the apartment is rented, whichever comes first. The list also includes **Homes for Sale** in Heritage Hill. **For Sale** listings cost \$100 and run

for two months. Additional services that we offer landlords and tenants include assistance with their respective rights and responsibilities. **The Heritage Herald:** The Association produces and publishes 6 bi-monthly newsletters that are mailed to a combined 4,500 addresses in Heritage Hill, non-resident members, businesses, city offices and other community resources. It publicizes events, issues, and other information of interest and concern to neighbors. The Herald provides information, promotes neighborhood identity and fosters community. The Association also uses **Email alerts and Facebook** to keep people informed and activated. Please forward your email address to us heritage@heritagehillweb.org to be added to this distribution list.

Heritage Hill Website: The Association's website hosts a variety of information regarding our neighborhood. The apartment listing is posted on the website as well as the **guidelines of the City's Historic Preservation Commission** (HPC) and the application for all exterior work. There is information and links to the Federal historic tax credits. Most every house in Heritage Hill has historical, architectural information and photos from 1969 and 2004 posted on our site. Go to the "about" heading on our home page and scroll down to the "house search". The Association's **Facebook** is also easily accessed from the home page of the website.



The Weekend Tour of Homes

(3rd Weekend in May) This is the **largest fundraising and promotional effort** of the Heritage Hill Association. The funds are needed to sustain our Crime Prevention and Neighborhood Improvement programs. It also promotes our architectural heritage and neighborhood as a great place to live, work and visit! The date for **2017 is May 20 and 21.**

The Heritage Hill Garden Tour: A fun-raiser for Heritage Hill gardeners, the Garden Tour is held nearly every year. The 2017 Garden Tour is headed back to south end of Heritage Hill. This is the call-out to *all you south Heritage Hill gardeners!* Please consider opening your quiet space a Saturday in mid-July and call or email the office and let us get you on our garden line-up in 2017.

Suzanne DeHaan enjoys the "deconstruction" cake of 11 College SE.

gather around our the first Tuesday in typically the first week in an annual neighborhood-wide **Yard Sales Day the first Saturday** in June.

Architectural Files: The HHA office maintains the architectural survey files of each house in the neighborhood that were compiled in 1969. This survey was needed to place Heritage Hill on the **National Register of Historic Places** that effectively saved over 75% of the neighborhood from demolition. Much of the information from these files is posted by address on our website in the house search category under the "About" heading.

Etc, Etc, Etc... The **Heritage Hill Association office** is often the first place neighbors call with numerous questions regarding ... most anything. Common questions are historic preservation guidelines, apartment seeking, neighborhood issues, who is my neighbor ... who to call for ... how can I handle "this problem" ... what is that house zoned for, landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities, service provider referrals, ... when is garbage day ... etc., etc, etc.

Social Events: The Association hosts two annual neighborhood wide events to bring neighbors together to community table. The **Neighborhood-Wide Night Out** is August; the **Holiday Potluck and Annual Meeting** is December. The Association also invites neighbors to hold



The Association and South Hill were recognized for building Pleasant Park at the May 2016 Historic Preservation Awards Ceremony. Huge applause to the Friends of GR Parks and the City of Grand Rapids for making it happen.

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THE ASSOCIATION AND NEIGHBORS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2016:

LAND USE ISSUES:

As the City of Grand Rapids booms with development, the few remaining vacant parcels in Heritage Hill are in demand. It is very hard to add units to residential homes in Heritage Hill due to its zone classification of LDR - low

density residential; very difficult to convert a single family to a multi-family unless there is a past use as a multi-family. However larger parcels such as the 50 College SE is 2.5 acres. Depending on the zone classification and surrounding use patterns, higher density developments will be allowed per the GR Zoning Code. Much of 2016 centered on guiding large projects within our boundaries and engaging neighbors in that process. Make sure you stay in the know and are engaged! If you are not receiving our emails, please send us yours at heritage@heritagehillweb.org. Also like us on Facebook.

- 50 College SE:** This large and vacant commercial parcel that was home to the Social Security Administration office was purchased by Orion Construction in the summer of 2016. Meetings began with neighbors in August to guide this redevelopment. The *Report for the Reuse of 50 College SE* that the Association facilitated with neighbors in 2015 was the starting vision. Six community neighbor meetings were held to shape and tweak details of this



major development and address neighbors' concerns. Orion developers were very accommodating to neighbors' voices and addressed most issues that were within the parameters of the City's zoning code and legal rights of the owner. Not all neighbors approve of the 4-story, 84 unit apartment building but most appreciate the numerous changes that made the development more appropriately tailored to its historic urban setting and made the project a better neighbor. The 50 College SE parcel is a complicated zoning mix of commercial and LDR plus it is large at 2.5 acres. The pattern on the square block where it is located contains many larger apartment buildings. What zoning interprets as the square block is the east side of College, north side of Cherry, west side of Union, south side of Fulton. The density ratio on the block is 40 units per acre. This is what the City's Zoning guidelines use in judging the appropriateness of this use. The property owner has legal rights that apply to their parcel if the pattern of surrounding uses is similar to what they intend.

At this writing the plans are nearing approval through the GR Historic Preservation Commission and will be before the City's Planning Commission on January 26.

- Oakwood Manor – 547 Cherry SE:** Owners presented plans in early summer to re-use the commercial space



Rapids Historic Preservation Commission approved the

of the first floor. Many neighbor meetings were convened to address all aspects of plans for a restaurant, tasting room and other retail establishments as well as outdoor seating areas. An initial request before the City's Planning Commission was rejected due the non-specific nature of the request. Plans are currently on hold until a prospective tenant can be found. Neighbors meetings will resume once a specific request is proposed.

- 363 State Street:** A first in the City of Grand Rapids, a micro-unit development will be coming to the State Street Corridor. A 71-unit (350 sq. ft. per unit) building will be constructed at the site of the former Clark's Food Store. This development complied with the zoning classification of State Street and no land-use approvals were needed. The Grand

Santa always entertains all the kids at the Holiday Potluck and Annual Meeting.

demolition of the non-descript cement block building and design of the proposed building. The Association and most neighbors supported the demolition request. A neighbors' meeting was convened and many neighbors objected to the few parking spots provided on-site. The parking complies with City code but the issue is controversial in the neighborhood with neighbors on both sides of the issue. Ground-breaking is likely in the spring of 2017.

- **11 College SE – former Kent Skills/City High building:** It is a rare day that Heritage Hill supports a demolition in our neighborhood but the former Tech Center, City High School at the corner of Fountain and College was the exception. Neighbors have asked for its removal for decades and GRPS Superintendent Neal called it “righting the wrong”. Many 1880-1890 period houses were razed to make room for this 1960s concrete bunker that was not a contributing building to Heritage Hill. When its demise finally came, the massive concrete walls and structure did not fall easily. There are former City High parents and students that have fond memories of that building ... but for many more, the eyesore is gone and shouts of hooray resonated. The Innovation Central and Fountain Montessori buildings are out of the shadow of urban renewal and can shine once again. The campus is beautiful and will only get better with the future planned improvements.

- **Preservation Modernization Bills:** Responded and organized neighbors to oppose proposed legislation that would have dramatically changed historic preservation in Michigan. The proposal sought to sunset historic districts, remove standardized guidelines, and make local decision-making a political process rather than a preservation process were three components of this legislation. These bills were damaging to Heritage Hill and districts throughout the State. It was a 3-month massive campaign in concert with neighbors and Preservation groups throughout Michigan. The sister House and Senate bills never reached a vote due to this successful campaign. We remain on alert for any reintroduction of this legislation.

- **221 John NE:** A proposal to create a male residential treatment center (a twin of the women’s center at the Sanford House at 550 Cherry SE) was approved by the GR Planning Commission in September. A neighbors’ open house was held with light attendance. Several neighbors supported the project although the proposal also drew opposition from neighbors at the Planning Commission’s public hearing. *(The Association encourages neighbors to contact the Association if you have concerns. Additional meetings can be organized to discuss issues in advance of the formal approval process.)* The John Street house has had both commercial and institutional uses for 40 years; it is an architectural treasure; is in serious disrepair; has had institutional alterations that need to be removed and occupies a corner lot adjacent to mid and large apartment buildings. The same owners opened the women’s facility over a year ago and neighbors of this Cherry Street facility report that it is a good neighbor. The John Street house will be managed equally. All of these issues were taken into consideration in the Planning Commission’s decision to grant this special use proposal.

- **54 Jefferson SE – GRPS Museum School:** Association reps were involved in the early community engagement planning in preparation of the school’s opening in 2018. Community meetings with neighbors will begin in February 2017.

- **Pleasant Park** is the neighborhood gathering green spot in 2016 - a true public space embraced by its community. Planned and spontaneous events happened including the Association’s ice cream social, yoga,



Tony Davis takes a break from grilling his hot dogs at the Summer Picnic that he provides to the masses. Thank You!



Community officer, Craig Glowney with Rhonda and Maximilliar Mitchell-Glazner at the Holiday Potluck.

dog trainings, kite flying, sledding, ball games, Frisbee flying, trick or treating and *everything* play for all ages. We organized the Pleasant Park Tenders to maintain the gardens – *we are organizing this again so if you want to adopt a plot call Jan at 459-8950*. Pleasant Park Pals Facebook page is a good way to stay connected to the happenings.



- **State Street:** Continues to be the focus of our commercial corridor and implementation of the State Street Corridor Area Specific Plan. The developments at 363 State Street and the GRPS Museum School will add PEOPLE to hopefully attract retail services.
- **Potpourri of land use/traffic issues:** The Association reviews and investigates all zoning variance and traffic requests in Heritage Hill. Positions are proposed based on the Heritage Hill Master Plan, the City's zoning code criteria, and neighbors' feedback. In 2016 the Association was involved in the following:
 - **568 Madison SE:** Arranged open house for prospective owner and proposal to resume multi-family use. Neighbors were generally not in favor and prospect decided not to purchase home.

- **Residential Permit Parking:** The City enacted a permit parking ordinance early in 2014 however no established districts have yet to be requested by Heritage Hill neighbors. The Association has advertised and encourages this option on those blocks that meet the criteria for permit parking and whose neighbors support the installation. Petitions are being circulated in two areas however it has yet to be determined if there is enough neighbors' support. It remains on option but needs a majority of residents support in a defined 3-block minimum area.
- **400 – 430 Madison SE:** Numerous inquiries regarding possible uses from neighbors and prospective buyers. These lots are in the LDR (low density residential) zone and the large berm is protected.



Jim Payne, Trang Young, Ilana Chamelly, and Maria Zache at the HPC Awards. Trang and Ilana were both recognized for their incredible contributions that further GR historic preservation this year.

Potential uses are limited with these restrictions. As of today, there are no active proposals.

- **200-300 College SE speed humps:** A proposal to remove the speed humps in the City's re-surfacing work was resoundingly opposed by neighbors. The City re-installed the humps.
- **Mobility:** As the GR Forward plan begins implementation, reps provided updates regarding improved public transportation access that was published in the Heritage Herald. Updates were also provided regarding the **BRT Laker Line**.
- **Maintained a communication network** each of our neighboring hospitals, colleges and universities, and neighborhood associations. Met with Mercy Health Saint Mary's to continue strong working relationship on areas of common interest.
- **Preservation:** Co-hosted with the GR Historic Preservation Commission a window's workshop to teach attendees how to fix broken cords, glazing and installation.

Neighborhood Fun and Fund Development:

- Organized and orchestrated the annual **Weekend Tour of Homes** in May. Recruited hosts, house captains and 240 volunteers to staff the homes and welcomed 4000 tourists.
- Compiled and produced 6 issues of the **Heritage Herald** and distributed to 4,500 neighbors and friends.
- Produced and updated the apartment listings on a minimum weekly basis.

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- Organized the Heritage Hill **Night Out Ice Cream social** at Pleasant Park in August; Organized the annual Heritage Hill **Neighborhood-Wide Yard Sale Day** in June; and the **Holiday Potluck and Annual Meeting** in December.
- **Texas Hold-em** - Staffed 3 gaming events at TJ's Game Room throughout 2016.

Plus: Assisted 1000's of calls and requests regarding a multitude of quality of life issues in Heritage Hill

And we carry on in 2017 and work with you to make Heritage Hill the best it can be. We welcome all new neighbors in 2016 and encourage you to get active with your fellow neighbors on your block and in your neighborhood. It's your community and our shared place!



Dave Eppelheimer received a 2016 Distinguished Award for his contribution to Home Tour.

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Crime Prevention in 2015:

The city and state of Michigan have enjoyed a crime vacation for the last several years. A number of serious felony crimes have decreased according to the monthly reports that Neighborhood Associations receive from the Grand Rapids Police Department. Statistics for 2015 crime were not available at printing time for this Herald but we expect to close the year without a net increase in felony crime. There have been several serious incidents, (carjacking with arrests made), but, these are not the norm. A full review will be available next issue.

New neighbors: For tips on keeping your apartment or home safer from burglaries give Tansy Harris our new community organizer for crime prevention a call at 459-8950.

Neighbors are the Heart of Heritage Hill: Board members block club representatives, Association committee members and hundreds of individuals all over the Hill have a personal commitment to helping each other stay safe. We recognize their efforts.

Thank you to those who watch out for their older neighbors. The stories I hear indicate that people have all over the Hill engage and assist in tasks that help keep their long-time neighbors in their homes by providing rides to appointments, occasional meals, phone calls, shoveling and much more.

- Other neighbors distribute important information to their neighbors by forwarding the Heritage Hill E-Alerts about crime incidents and neighborhood events.
 - Some organize social activities or block meetings on current issues for their neighbors.
 - Many watch out for possible criminal activity and call the police and alert staff at HHA.
- All of these are enormously helpful in keeping our sense of community strong.

In 2015 Neighbors on Logan Street SE met with our **Community Officer Craig Glowney**. Pleasant Park neighbors met with **Community Officer Adam Baylis**, and the North College Block Club invited our former **Community Officer Aaron Rossin** to their January Saturday morning coffee. Prospect Avenue SE neighbors met with **Captain Pete McWaters** and our community officer and kept them updated throughout the year on several concerns they were addressing.

Block Reps are neighbor-activists: Block Reps bring issues and concerns from their blocks to the attention of the Heritage Hill Association staff, as do as other neighbors who are not shy about e-mailing or calling us too. When the Association and neighbors work together the result is often a problem solved. 2015 calls about included:

- Tall weeds and un-mowed grass, overflowing trash on curbs, exterior code violations,
- Suspicious activity, ongoing disturbances, a barking dog or two,
- Juvenile crime, speeding traffic, wrong way driving, and on and on.

Do You Feel Safer? Several times a year we ask if you feel safer in Heritage Hill as a result of our work on crime related issues. Last year that included:

- **Illegal Dumping:** Three properties suffered when someone dumped furniture, garbage and other loads of household goods on private property instead of taking it to the dump as they were most likely paid to do.
- **Crime-Alerts via E-Mail:** We sent out several dozen notices to neighbors' e-mail describing crimes and providing detailed information about how to prevent them. Generally our crime alerts in 2015 have been alerts about vehicle break-ins.
- **Burglary Prevention:** Our free Apartment and Home Security Surveys find defects that you might not. Last fall during a security survey requested by a new tenant we found that the unit was seriously out of compliance with the city of Grand Rapids Home Security requirements. Window locks were broken, no window pins were installed, a rear exit was blocked by heavy vines and obsolete locks offered little protection for the tenant. This building had been inspected more than once since the security ordinance was approved in 1991. We addressed this issue with both the tenant and the owner and have alerted the inspector.

- Madison, Cherry and State Street intersection: Wrong left turns from right lane resolved with directional sign.
- Union and Wealthy SE: Left turns from right lane and wrong-way driving resolved with signage and lane markings.
- Cherry Street Pot Holes: Patched (but more work needed!).
- College NE: Deep home at leaking water line in street repaired and filled.
- Park Safety: Pleasant Park and Foster Park are works-in-progress with neighbors, police and HHA staff active in making the parks safe and beautiful.
- Unsafe Parking on Washington and College SE: Drivers edged so close to the intersection it forced drivers to enter the cross street “blind” to oncoming traffic was resolved with alert to students, “No Parking” signs were installed then police enforcement.
- Man-in-a-Van Alert: Alerts were sent out when a neighbor reported a stranger made inappropriate remarks as she walked in a residential area just south of the Hill on a summer afternoon. There had been similar occurrences near Midtown and Eastown earlier in the year but the suspects were of different descriptions. No further occurrences have been reported.

NEIGHBORHOOD BEAUTIFICATION: People avoid areas where they see graffiti, trash in the gutters and bad behavior is allowed. Clean streets, free of graffiti, busy with bicyclists and pedestrians, with tidy green spaces and corner gardens are welcoming. Neighbors volunteer on two projects that help keep the Hill looking good.

- Adopt-a- (Utility)-Box is a graffiti removal project that four neighbors participate in. A couple more are needed. Paint over graffiti at your own pace in your own area. Call Tansy Harris at 459-8950 to sign-up.
- Street corner gardens and Park Clean-ups are done at both Pleasant Park and Foster Park.

HOUSING CODE ENFORCEMENT: The word “enforcement” is likely to irritate some of us who do not like to be told what to do with our own property. We get that. But, then there are a few problems that go unresolved until the City of Grand Rapids gets involved.

In 2015 neighbors have been concerned and watching two properties that suffered destructive fires.

- 133 Union NE: The owner worked closely with his insurance company and with the City of GR Code inspector and Historic Preservation Specialist to make sure he brought the multi-unit rental up to meet both the Housing Code and the Historic Preservation Standards. It is now completely rehabilitated and occupied.
- 512 College SE: We have all watched as this one-family home has stood empty and deteriorating all year while owners tried to find the best solution. As time passed we urged the city to act so further damage would not occur. The home was sold and a new owner is working to develop a plan for rehabilitation and checking in with City Historic Preservation and Code Enforcement. We look forward to lots of progress in 2016.

LEAD-SAFE WORK VIOLATIONS: Five neighbors reported witnessing painters sanding and dry-scraping the exterior of four homes in violation of EPA and State regulations. Those painters and several others at three more addresses often did not *properly* attach plastic sheeting to catch chips and some failed to wrap and tape the sheeting for safe disposal of chips. Complaints were filed with the EPA Regional office in Chicago, the State of Michigan and City of Grand Rapids on a franchised painting contractor and on two individual painters.



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Stopping further lead contamination by educating homeowners and painting contractors is vital. We are also working with Healthy Homes Coalition and the Rental Property Owners Association to let you know that help and information is available when selecting a contractor. More information is on our website, www.heritagehillweb.org.

This is my last Annual Crime Prevention recap – I’m passing baton to Tansy Harris. Same number, 459-8950 but new

person to address your needs. It's been the best job for these 29 years but I'm relieved to be back from where I first started – the smiling receptionist in HHA's front office – Barb Lester (aka Auntie Barb from now on).