

The Heritage Hill Association's 2012 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.

From the 2010 census, there are **1,300 structures** in the neighborhood that house **3,467 households**. Of these households, 70% are tenants, 30% are owners. Our **population totals 4,103**. Of that total, 81% are Caucasian, 9% are African American, 4% are Hispanic or Latino, 2% are Asian, the remaining 4% is a mix of Native American, Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander and mixed races; 64% are our residents are low to moderate income. As of 2002, 66% of our structures are either owner occupied or neighbor owned; the remaining 34% are absentee-owned.

Heritage Hill is an urban neighborhood and the Association's programs assist and work with neighbors to **address urban problems** -- neighborhood safety, land use conflicts, increasing traffic and parking demands, institutional expansion/construction disruption, housing maintenance and preservation issues, promotion of neighborhood schools, access to limited 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 all our neighborhood institutions, the City of Grand Rapids, and any and all community resources, are the best indicators that Heritage Hill is a vital place to live and work!

Heritage Hill was recognized by the American Planning Association in 2012 as a **Great Place in America**. In 2011, *This Old House* magazine as it named Heritage Hill named one of **2011 Best Neighborhoods in the United States**.

A LITTLE HISTORY:

In 1968, neighbors organized together to stop mortgage red lining and the 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.

OUR SERVICES:

The Crime Prevention Program: This 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 work together to prioritize problems, identify resources, and develop and implement action plans to resolve problems. In 2012, this program was primarily funded by federal Community Development Block Grants that the **City of Grand Rapids** receives and then funds a myriad of community programs, one of which is the Heritage Hill Association's.

Neighborhood Improvement Program: This program addresses all the other quality of life issues that are not crime related. Its purpose is to generate resident involvement and leadership to preserve, protect, and maintain the residential nature 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.

Apartment/Homes for Sale Listing Service: Due to our **large rental community**, the Association produces and publishes a weekly 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 renting like hotcakes! Our list is free and available at our office and also on our Web site (www.heritagehillweb.org). 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 a bi-monthly newsletter that is mailed to the 4,800 addresses in Heritage Hill. It publicizes events, issues, and other information of interest to neighbors. This is done to promote neighborhood identity and foster community. Occasional **e-newsletters** and updates keep people informed in between the HHA's printed newsletters. Please forward your email address to us heritage@heritagehillweb.org to be added to this distribution list.

The Heritage Hill Web Site: The Association had a total make-over of its website that went live in October, 2012. The site hosts a variety of information regarding our neighborhood. The apartment listing is available here along with the **guidelines of the City's Historic Preservation Commission** and the application for any exterior work. There is information and links to the Federal historic tax credits. Most every house in Heritage Hill has its historical and 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 Annual Tour of Homes: This is the **largest fund-raiser 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 our neighborhood as a great place to live and work!

The Home Tour moved back to its initial spring roots in 2011. The fabulous ArtPrize was too tough to compete with so we've moved Tour out of its way! The date for **2013 is May 18 and 19.**

The Annual Heritage Hill Garden Tour: The 2013 Garden Tour is back to the north end of Heritage Hill and is under the leadership of North College Block Club (NCBC). The date is set for **June 29, 2013** and this is the call-out to *all you northern Heritage Hill gardeners!*

Social Events: The Association hosts two annual neighborhood wide events to bring all neighbors together to gather around our community table. The **Neighborhood-Wide Night Out Picnic (August 6, 2013)** is in August; the **Holiday Potluck and Annual Meeting (December 5, 2013)** is the Thursday after the Thanksgiving weekend. The Association also invites neighbors to hold an annual neighborhood-wide **Yard Sales Day (June 8, 2013).**

Architectural and Historical Survey Files: The HHA office maintains the architectural survey files of each house in the neighborhood that were compiled in 1969. This survey was necessary 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 numerous questions regarding ... most anything. Common questions include historic preservation, landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities, contractor referrals, neighborhood issues, who lives at ... who to call for this ... how can I handle this problem ... what is that house zoned for ... when is garbage day ... where do I vote ...etc., etc, etc.

THE ASSOCIATION AND NEIGHBORS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2012:

Land Use Issues:

- **Pleasant Park:** Great strides were made in this 20-year dream of building a park on this 2.5 acres of crumbling asphalt. The focus in 2012 was on fundraising mode and we have 75% of the funds committed, thanks to the State DNR Trust fund, the City's Community Development Block Grant dollars and the special tax assessment that was approved by near property owners and the City Commission in January 2013. Hopefully the summer of 2013 will see the first shovel of construction with completion in June of 2014. HHA hosted a WYCE Hat Trick concert for the Park in November and promoted donations at its Annual Meeting and on our website. For those neighbors outside of the assessment district (Lafayette to Union; Logan to Franklin) we encourage a "self-assessment" that you can make at the Friends of GR Parks website - <http://www.friendsofgrparks.org/pleasantpark>.
- **Mary Free Bed:** Participated in the design and approval process of the major addition and parking ramp construction on the west side of the current hospital building at 235 Wealthy SE. HHA stressed a pedestrian friendly and active use for the first floor streetscape frontage. While not a perfect resolution, a building redesign was a major improvement in meeting these values. The current construction site was altered so that an active development at the Wealthy and Jefferson intersection can happen in the future.
- **State Street Corridor Improvement Plan:** The draft plan is nearly complete following a year's work gathering stakeholders' input and incorporating those dreams into a visual and articulated plan. The plan's drawings and maps need to be finalized before the draft plan can be reviewed by participants of the planning sessions. A new neighbor, the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi purchased 311 State Street. They are currently in construction mode and redeveloping this corner as a Native American center that will provide medical and cultural services.

- **Michigan Street Corridor Planning:** Continued work with the City of Grand Rapids and numerous stakeholders on the Corridor Plan. This plan addresses the look, feel, traffic patterns (vehicle, pedestrian and cycles) and land uses of this major artery from the Grand River to the Beltline. HHA hosted a Heritage Hill focus group gathering and promoted the city-wide forums held in June and October. The 2-year planning process will be completed in 2013.
- **Martha's Vineyard Development:** Assisted and supported this development that is happening east of Martha's along Lyon Street. The first building behind the current Martha's is in very poor condition and the cost of rehab is way beyond market value. A well-screened parking lot will replace the building with a circular traffic pattern entering from the alley on Union and exiting on Lyon. The second building will be rehabbed with commercial storefront(s) on the street level and likely residential on the second story. When completed in 2013, this will be Grand Rapids' destination corner for all food and drink desires.
- **Great Place in America:** In 2012, Heritage Hill was honored with the American Planning Association's annual award when it named Heritage Hill as a "Great Place in America". The honor highlighted the neighborhood's early preservation work and also stressed its planning history and neighbors community engagement. Celebrated this designation with the APA representatives, City officials, and HHA Board members at an award ceremony at **GRCC's White Hall**. An appropriate venue as GRCC unveiled its total restoration and Silver LEED certification of this historic home this past spring. It is a stunning tribute and acclamation that historic structures can be made energy efficient. We applaud GRCC for its commitment and value of Heritage Hill.
- **Bed and Breakfast ordinance:** HHA supported the GR Zoning Code change that clarified the allowed uses of B&B with regard to gatherings and meals. HHA stressed its support of traditional bed and breakfasts that preserve the residential character of the neighborhood.
- **Bethlehem Lutheran Church:** Numerous options for this former Church building approached the Association however no plans were pursued. The building remains an opportunity waiting to happen and neighbors stress their support of a residential use of 16 or fewer units.
- **Zoning issues:** The Association reviews all zoning requests in Heritage Hill and determines positions by reviewing the Master Plan of Heritage Hill, soliciting neighbors' opinions, and developing a position for the Association's Board debate. These positions are presented to the respective City Boards for their decision making process. In 2012, HHA voiced positions on:
 - **538 Madison:** supported the use of this former school building for use as a 3-unit due to its unique shape, size and 4-city lot parcel; **421 Madison SE:** Voiced opposition to a request for use as a 3-unit and the proposal was not pursued; **Crescent Floral:** Supported this re-use of a commercial use as a real estate office; **517 Wealthy:** Opposed the size of the proposed parking lot construction at this visible Wealthy Street property and encouraged a tradition driveway with a rear turn around. The driveway scenero was approved and was installed. **Prospect, Lafayette, Wealthy corner:** **ICCF's** development of this corner has languished as funding has yet to be secured. Once funding is in place, a proposal will be designed and reviewed by neighbors and the Association. The Association supported ICCF's grant application for demolition of the former Little Jack's store. Celebrated the opening of ICCF's residential/commercial buildings at LaGrave and Wealthy. The great design and use of these buildings are a welcome street front to this gateway of Heritage Hill. The future is so bright for Wealthy Street as the 30-year effort of *Wealthy Street Alive* becomes real.
- **Saint Mary's Hospital:** Continued to hold neighbors' meetings with representatives to address mutual issues on a semi-annual frequency. Applauded the opening of Sophia's house (the former Saint Luke's at the corner of Lafayette and Cherry) as a short term housing facility for patients' families.
- **Schools:** 2012 brought growing opportunities within and beyond Grand Rapids Public Schools for Heritage Hill children and parents. The Association encourages exploring and finding a good fit for your family. Investigating school options is a lot easier when compared to moving and leaving the neighborhood!
 - **Child Discovery Center** - Applauded the revival of this school, the playground construction, and supported the Child Discovery Center's (CDC) capital campaign for the pre-school addition on the south side of this former Vandenberg school. It is alive with children and supporters once again.

- **Central Campus Network** - Hosted a meeting with new GRPS superintendent, Teresa Neil, where she outlined her vision and plans for the Central Campus. By the end of 2012, plans for this campus were cemented for the GR Montessori Program (K-12) as well as the variety of specialty high schools of GRPS within Central High.
- Reviewed monthly **Grand Rapids Zoning and Planning Department** agendas for issues affecting the neighborhood.
- Maintained **communication network** with each of our neighboring hospitals, colleges and universities, institutions, and neighborhood associations.
- Assisted 4 residents with necessary documentation for the State's **Historic Tax Credits** program that unfortunately has ended. The Federal tax credits are still in effect for any income producing property.

Crime Prevention and Community Organizing:

- **Resident Assistance:** A huge part of crime prevention is talking with neighbors and businesses and other organizations in the neighborhood. Talk is cheap but it pays off big time when we can use your knowledge to improve housing or stop crime in the Hill. We get hundreds of calls a year about housing issues like trash, garbage, interior code violations, and questions about what can be done when it seems the problems go on forever.
- **Victim Assistance:** Some victims call us but quite often we call them. Most of our crimes are misdemeanors like disturbances, car break-ins, loud parties, parking tickets and other non-violent incidents. When we see an address with recurring problems we may contact the owners to see if they are aware of the problem and need help with the problem (i.e. loud parties). Some victims call us to report a burglary or suspicious activity on their block. We always offer to help with following up with the detective on the case or with the impacting a court case if there is an arrest. Do not suffer in silence. Give us a call at 459-8950.
- **Housing Checks:** This year we preformed 7 home and apartment security surveys and found ways intruders could get inside residences without making a lot of noise. Our recommendations would force a thief to kick in doors and break glass to get in. We provided free window pins (compliments of Rylee's Hardware on Michigan) and installed them in several properties. The "pins" are a deterrent to thieves. *For example;* a man broke a small bathroom window this summer and made *so much noise* he woke up the fellow inside who screamed so loudly that the intruder ran away. Neighbors are surprised at the cheap tricks that can alert them to an intruder or stop an intruder before he tries to get in.
- **Home Burglary:** Addressed a small increase in burglaries (14) that occurred between July and the September by updating neighbors through our E- Alerts Network, our newsletter, *Heritage Herald* and by working with our Community officer Kristen Gibbons and Detective Brad Heugel. Several arrests were made and we had no burglaries in November.
- **Kept Safety in the Housing Code:** Heritage Hill led a Neighborhood Coalition effort to stop the city from dropping burglary prevention requirements when it adopted the International Property Maintenance Code in July. Neighborhood Association pushed burglary preventing window pins and received a unanimous vote of support from our City Commissioners.
- **Heritage Hill and Creston Neighborhood Association** worked with Clay Powell, Director of the RPOA on their terrific Landlord Crime Prevention Certification Training Manual, supplying information how owners can take advantage of the many ways Associations will work with owners on crime and housing issues.
- **Car Crimes:** Stealing from our cars is the least risky but profitable crime for petty thieves. It is the number one nuisance crime and we continually urge neighbors to leave nothing in their cars. If thieves are not profitable, they will stop hunting in our neighborhood. Please make sure your quests are not leaving valuables in their cars too. Out of a list of 25 vehicle related crimes in a one week period recently police reported no leads or no investigation on every one of them. Breaking a window and grabbing a purse or lap top is a quick and riskless crime for anyone who can run quickly and jump tall fences.

- **Court Watch:** When an arrest occurs in the Hill we let neighbors know about getting involved in Court Watching the cases. Neighbors stopped crimes in progress with calls to the police reporting a burglar in the basement (arrested), a man breaking into a car (arrested), a chronic disturber of the peace (arrested). We coordinated a Court Watch on an absentee rental owner whose properties were a nuisance. Staff and neighbors attended two of his hearings and worked with Officer Shelly Weiss to see justice done. He pled to both charges. We often use public court records in following up on arrests in the neighborhood and provide the information to rental owners and to crime victims. Rental owners express great appreciation for our updates as most have no knowledge when an arrest occurs.
- **Police Budget Cuts:** Our staff organized a Neighborhood Coalition response to the ICMA consultant's recommendations made to the City for cutting officers and reorganization of the Grand Rapids Police Department. HHA staff worked with Coalition members to draft a letter of that detailed specific issues of concern to the City Commission. Chief Kevin Belk acknowledged the Neighborhood Association's contribution to public discussion in his presentation to the City Commission in January.
- **Information Hub:** Heritage Hill serves as a kiosk for information that comes in from various sources and goes out to other sources. Having built trust with other organizations like the Police, Courts, Historic Preservation, Planning, Housing we can better assist neighbors and institutions as they work with us.
- **Institutional Memory:** Staff, board members and long-time neighbors who remember the crack houses of the 1980s (now lovely homes and apartments) and other issues of the issues of the 1970s, 80s, 90s and 2000s, help us address current issues. This historic knowledge puts problems into perspective. Some believe that problems are worse than ever. But crime statistics for our neighborhood and for Grand Rapids are lower now than in 1980 through the 2000s. Our "institutional memory" keeps us from going off-track whenever there is a bump in crime stats. History is also vital on zoning and housing issue. There is always someone who recalls says, "Didn't that address have restrictions or options written into a zoning decision years ago?" This knowledge is invaluable and it is widely held and shared when issues come up.
- **Housing addressed:** Most housing issue come to the Association from concerned neighbors who have tried to resolve the issues themselves but are not satisfied with the results. We have worked with neighbors on issues at the addresses below. Most have been resolved and several have open cases we continue to monitor and act on as required. 500 block Lyon NE; 300 block College SE; 400 block Paris SE; 100 block College NE; 400 block Crescent NE; 300 block Union SE; 500 block of Union SE; 500 block Wealthy SE; 300 block State SE; 300 block State SE; 500 block E. Fulton.
- **Multi-Block Meeting with Consumers Energy:** Coordinated a meeting with Consumers' reps after hearing from a number of neighbors who have had damaged appliances from many electrical brown-outs and transformers blowing up. The problem is that Consumers has very old lines and not enough transformers in the area. A major overhaul is in the works for early 2013.
- **Foster Park and State Street Clean Ups:** We coordinated two Clean ups on State Street and in Foster Park this year. A dozen Calvin College students worked in August and 15 Job Corp students helped in October. Both groups were fun to work with and made a huge difference.
- **Kent County Renters Alliance:** Heritage Hill Association is one of several dozen founding member organizations that formed the Alliance in 2011. The Alliance provides free legal information on renter rights to tenants in Kent County. HHA has had the pleasure of assisting the legal clinic three times in 2012. There is at least one attorney and three law students from Cooley Law School assisting clients on the first and third Mondays of each month.

RENTAL OWNER ASSISTANCE:

- **Code Violations:** We also helped rental owners by alerting them to code violations before they were turned in to the city – allowing them to deal with the problems without the large cost in fee and fines if a city inspector comes out. This occurred on College NE and SE, E. Fulton, Campbell NE, Washington SE, Union SE, Crescent NE and Paris SE with excellent results.

- **Crime at Rentals:** We also contact owners when we know of a crime incident or of a tenant arrested on the property. In mid-November we called the rental owner to alert him to his tenant who was “renting” his apartment to multiple victims. We contacted the Grand Rapids Police Department when the first victim called us and Det. Brad Heugle opened a case and worked closely with victims and the owner. Victims lost \$10,000 and were devastated. The owner was very grateful for the assistance we provided to him as a liaison with the police and the court.

Parking/Traffic/Street Construction:

- **Parking and traffic concerns** continue to be issues for neighbors, primarily in the north end but also pockets of concern in the mid and south end of Heritage Hill. We continue to respond to issues as best we can with limited tools to effect change.
- Monitored/assisted with concerns regarding the neighborhood sewer replacement projects. More work is coming in 2013 for State Street, the 0-100 blocks of College SE, and Washington.

Neighborhood Promotion:

- Organized and orchestrated the annual **Weekend Tour of Homes** that showcased 7 private homes and 5 public buildings. Recruited **223 volunteers** to staff the homes and put out the welcome mat to 2,300 guests.
- Organized the fifth annual **Garden Tour** that united gardeners with Heritage Hill garden hosts. This event showcases the variety of urban garden that is a growing and passionate movement in Heritage Hill.
- Compiled and published 6 issues of the **Heritage Herald** and distributed to **4,800 neighbors** and posted at our website.
- Compiled, produced and provided weekly **apartment listings** at the HHA office and website. Advertised the Association’s rental listing service and available apartments in GVSU’s student newspaper and Craig’s List.
- Organized the **Heritage Hill Night Out Picnic** at Foster Park in August. The kazu parade is a sight to behold.
- Organized the annual **Heritage Hill Neighborhood-Wide Yard Sale Day** in August 2012 - another passionate event!

Fund Development: As the Association's usual sources of revenue have been dwindling for the past five years, the need to develop new funding opportunities was in focus in 2012. Working with Saint Mary's CEO Phil McCorkle and Micki Benz, the hospital hosted a luncheon for surrounding institutions and companies that benefit from the programs and services of the Association. Saint Mary's has been a long and generous supporter of the Heritage Hill Association and view us as a service provider. A safe and vibrant neighborhood for our neighboring corporations reflects their corporate values and is an enormous benefit to their staff, clients, and visitors that utilize our neighborhood streets on a daily basis.

HHA staff and Board members are in process of meeting and furthering this discussion with potential corporate sponsors in hopes of replacing needed revenues. Until additional funding is secured, the Association has cut staff hours and operations to a Monday through Thursday work week. If you and or your employer can find room in the budget to support your neighborhood association, we really need the revenue and will put the money to great work in Heritage Hill.

The Association developed sponsorship and program brochures that are available if you need information to solicit donations. We sure could use all of our neighbors help in raising our corporate awareness on the importance of community and a strong neighborhood at their place of business. It is a place that we all share.

- Texas Hold-em - Staffed 4 gaming events at TJ's Game Room throughout 2012.

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

And we continue working with you in 2013 ... We welcome all new neighbors in 2012 and encourage you to get active in your neighborhood. We have a place for you!

Barb Lester's addendum to the 2012 HHA Annual Report

And the award goes to... Jan Earl, Executive Director of the Heritage Hill Association. Jan received her recognition for her outstanding work by the City of Grand Rapids Preservation Commission. For the past twenty-six years I have had the pleasure to work with one of the best community organizers in the country. Jan has always supported staff efforts to do a good job. She allows us to expand our work beyond the "job-description" instead of using it to limit our learning and experiences. That is why your crime prevention worker also works on some housing, zoning, and strategic planning issues. There is no glass ceiling at the HHA office! Instead of protecting turf, Jan shares her knowledge and allows us to learn more, do more and to experience the heady pleasure of being recognized for our work.

As a highly respected Director of a very successful non-profit organization in Grand Rapids, mayors, commissioners and city staff, respect Jan's reputation for operating with high ethical standards, for maintaining the financial integrity of the Association's use of city funds, for her efforts to include residents and board members in decision-making and by accessing the information and history behind many of our important neighborhood issues.

Jan is the go-to person for every staff person, all board members, residents, city staff and commissioners when we need information, an opinion, ideas or help in getting to the crux of an issue and resolving it. She is "on the job" even at home, when neighbors catch her walking the dog, she is there when we walk by while she is mowing her lawn, and she is there on weekends when neighbors and board members call to hash out the issues. She is in meetings many nights each month and I really do believe that we would *telepathically* reach her when she is sleeping if we could.

We hear about team-building and newer ways of managing workers but Jan wrote that book a long time ago. If you wonder why Heritage Hill is so successful we can pat ourselves on the back for our good work but the buck *always* stops at Jan's desk (thank goodness), and we all rest easy knowing that! Have you noticed that staff *never* voluntarily leaves the Association?

This 2012 Preservation Award represents all the recognition, acknowledgements, prizes, trophies and plaques that Jan could have received over the years for her share of the success Heritage Hill Association has had in fulfilling its stated mission in "assisting neighbors to build a healthy, historically preserved community in which we can live and work in a secure and stable environment." It is well deserved.

Barb Lester

Crime Prevention Organizer HHA