The Heritage Hill Association’s
2014 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 community resources, are the best indicators that Heritage Hill is a vital place to live and work!

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 and the State Street Corridor Area Specific Plan 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 2014, 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** 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 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 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](http://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 2015 is May 16 and 17.

**The Heritage Hill Garden Tour:** The Garden Tour rotates from the south to north every year so the 2015 Garden Tour is headed back to north end of Heritage Hill. This is the call-out to all you northern Heritage Hill gardeners! Please consider opening your quiet space this summer and call or email the office and let us get you on our garden line-up in 2015.

**Social Events:** The Association hosts two annual neighborhood wide events to bring neighbors together to gather around our community table. The Neighborhood-Wide Night Out is in August; the Holiday Potluck and Annual Meeting is the week after the Thanksgiving weekend. The Association also invites neighbors to hold an annual neighborhood-wide Yard Sales Day 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 numerous questions regarding … most anything. Common questions include historic preservation guidelines, 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 2014:**
LAND USE ISSUES:

- **Pleasant Park**: is a reality in 2014. The ribbon was cut in July to the cheers and drum beats of neighbors and kids. This is the crown jewel of decades of wishing and hoping, culminating with the past three years of dedicated planning, fundraising, and construction. The Park is alive and rare to see empty since it officially opened this summer. The sledding hill is a hit this winter. Neighbors planted trees this past fall and the perennial gardens will take shape in the spring. Watch for the call-out for volunteers to help with these. Huge thanks to the Friends of GR Parks and the City of Grand Rapids for making neighbors' dreams and efforts come true.

- **State Street**: The Association’s Corridor Area Specific Plan began moving through the City’s approval process. A zoning plan was needed so that City enforcement could realize the plan. An Association task force provided that zoning interpretation. State Street's renewal blossomed this year with the redevelopment and expansion of **345 State Street** (July 2015 opening), the $12+ million renovation of the **Styvesant Apartments**, and the grand opening of **HQ** (youth center) at 320 State Street. This joins the prior years' openings of Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi at 311 State Street and the Cornerstone Church at the former Church of Christ Scientists at the corner of Lafayette and Washington. And more is in the works as the former Grand Rapids Public Museum becomes the new museum school of GRPS planned for 2016.

- **Residential Permit Parking**: The City enacted a permit parking ordinance early in 2014 and we asked the question to residents if residential permit parking would help ease parking congestion in primarily north end portions of Heritage Hill. This was not an outpouring of support but some blocks have captains that will be circulating petitions in early spring of 2015. If there are enough neighbors who want permit parking, the Association will apply for a targeted restricted parking zone with the City of GR.

- **Potpourri of land use**: The Association’s zoning committee reviews and investigates all zoning variance requests in Heritage Hill. Positions are proposed based on the Heritage Hill Master Plan, the City’s zoning code criteria, and neighbors’ feedback. In 2014 the Association was involved in the following:
  - **44 Lafayette NE**: Supported increase to 5 units at this 4 condo building. Neighbors met with owner and reviewed needs. GR Planning Commission approved a total of 6 units deeming that the size of the building could support the additional units.
o 50 College SE: This large commercial parcel has had several inquiries for potential new development in the last year. There has been no specific proposal but the Association determined it should be pro-active due to the size and location of this parcel. A neighbors planning process began taking shape in late 2014 to recruit facilitators and design the process for seeking neighbors preference in use and design. The charrette was held in early January, 2015 with a full report to be presented in late winter.

o 543 Prospect SE: A request to convert this single family home to a 2-family dwelling was proposed; meetings held with neighbors, and decision made to oppose the use due to its location in the middle of this single family block. The City’s Zoning Appeals denied the two-family request.

o 540 Cherry SE, Sanford House: New owners proposed using this institutional home as a residential recovery treatment home for women. The site had been used as a treatment facility but needed the residential component to its use. Association members and neighbors met with the owner, toured the property and were concerned with potential future uses as a residential facility. The use was opposed but included key points that needed to be included if the City’s Planning Commission supported the use. That is what happened. The facility was under construction most of the year with extensive restoration.

o 320 State Street: Held a neighbors’ meeting with the new owners to review and discuss allowed use as a homeless youth drop in center. Welcomed HQ at its open house in November, 2014.

o 616 Lofts Open House: Following extensive work to this former church building, invited neighbors to tour its new life as an apartment building. 616 Lofts began leasing in July and has had full occupancy almost immediately.

- **Michigan Street Corridor Plan:** The draft plan was unveiled in February 2014 followed with final editing and reworking throughout most of the year. Its formal approval process began in December. The Plan will likely take effect in 2015. Many of the Michigan Street projects that are happening now follow the guidelines of this extensive Corridor Plan.

- **Bed and Breakfast ordinance/Air BnB:** The taskforce regarding Bed and Breakfast and AirBnB use in Grand Rapids presented recommendations early in 2014. Several Heritage Hill representatives served and worked hard to offer a fair yet protective ordinance within residential communities. These recommendation became the ordinance in Grand Rapids. Air BnB licenses began being issued last fall.
• **GRForward:** Heritage Hill reps began working on this *Big Idea* plan for downtown and riverfront and are hosting a series of meetings and promoting the variety of city forums. Exciting ideas are in movement to open the river for fun recreation and environmental protection. The first HH meeting was held in December, 2014 with the next two in February and March.

• **Tapestry Square/ICCF:** The Heritage Hill Association has worked with ICCF for many, many years on development of the Wealthy Division corridor. The Association was involved in a task force that worked on marketing strategies to attract a grocer to this district. Discussions also included the redevelopment of the Prospect, Lafayette, Wealthy corner that is still waiting for funding before plans become final. Groundbreaking will begin for the housing units at the Logan, Sheldon corner in late January, 2015.

• **Schools:** Educational choices expanded in 2014 at the GRPS Central campus. Innovation Central is home to 4 specialty high schools - Academy of Health Science & Technology; Academy of Design and Construction; Academy of Modern Engineering; and the Academy of Business, Leadership & Entrepreneurship as well as the Montessori High School. The Association supports its schools and strongly encourages exploring all option to find a good fit for your family. Investigating and comparing school options is a lot easier than moving and leaving the neighborhood! We welcomed a new principal, John Roberts who now leads the Child Discovery Center at 409 Lafayette SE.

• **Maintained a communication network** each of our neighboring hospitals, colleges and universities, and neighborhood associations.

• **Road construction:** Was torturous for the mid section of Heritage Hill for most of 2014 even though the drama of it all was mildly entertaining for some. Traffic, parking, and construction noise and vibration made it tough going throughout most of the year. ... And it is coming back in 2015 - not on College or Washington although intersections will likely be torn up.

**Crime Prevention:**

Priorities for working on crime are based on residents’ concerns. Concerns always have to do with personal safety so home burglary and street safety are at the top of the list. In 1987 there were 151 burglaries in the neighborhood. In 2014 neighbors reported 24 home break-ins, although in six cases the intruder found an unlocked door or window to enter. The numbers reflect a nation-wide reduction in serious crime as well as a downward trend locally. But, our numbers in Grand Rapids have been going down since we passed the Deadbolt Lock Ordinance in 1989 that requires deadbolts, window
locks and a number of other safety hardware on homes and apartments in Grand Rapids. Heritage Hill burglaries have been reduced almost every year since then.

**Personal safety:** Though many crimes are lower than decades ago, crimes of violence occur and are difficult for us to prevent when they come from within a family or circle of acquaintances. Last spring Glenn Converse, a neighbor on the 300 block of Washington was killed inside his apartment. This was not a case of home burglary. We are saddened and concerned that it occurred. The case is under investigation but no arrest has been made as yet. **There were 9 aggravated assaults in 2014 and four were acquaintance or family-related and two were at a school.** Our streets are safer but with so many residents walking and biking it is vital that personal safety stay a priority.

**Vehicle break-ins:** Thefts from vehicles are a low-risk crime for the thieves. We continually warn neighbors to reduce the problem by removing valuables and many do. But new neighbors are often not aware of the problem and learn the hard way. We had **50 thefts of property or parts in 2014** though that number is moving downward from **73 in 2012.**

**Graffiti:** Spray painted buildings and utility boxes have a negative effect on the image of our neighborhood. In April of 2014 the Association developed **Adopt-A-Box,** a project that asks neighbors to sign up to keep a utility box in their area graffiti free. Six neighbors have painted over tags on utility boxes in all areas of the Hill since then and even during this winter. Thanks very much to all who are keeping us free from graffiti!

**Crime Fighting Resources:** Any area that has successfully reduced crime generally has neighbors to thank for it. Neighborhoods decay quickly if the people who live in them are not actively engaged in responding to crime problems and working to stop them. The Heritage Hill Association has a history of using any resource we can to make the neighborhood safe. **We work with the Police Department and our Community Officer Arron Rossin, our City Commissioners, Fire Safety, Housing Inspections, rental property owners, block captains and crime victims, to address problems.**

**Block Reps:** We work with Community Officer Aaron Rossin on these problems and with block contacts too. Each block generally has at least one person we know that will help out in a crime crunch. Some blocks have a Block Rep/Captain and many have a lot of active neighbors who HHA calls on to work on issue or problems. It is based on the concept of Neighborhood Watch.

**Neighbor Groups:** Block Clubs have a long history in Heritage Hill and all over the city. Once a group of three or more neighbors gets together change begins to happen. Neighbors on **Prospect near Washington SE** met this fall after a man was shot in a drug-related incident in the area. The neighbors and HHA staff met with the managers of the four-unit building and our neighborhood Police Team Captain and community officer. The group worked toward an understanding that increases communication and encourages crime reporting to each other and to the police. **Union Avenue Neighbors** just south of E. Fulton organized a meeting this spring and met with City Engineering staff and Jim Cobb from Black and Veech who we call “the Fixer” to discuss the street construction going on there. Block Clubs have gained access to many resources and information by working with HHA and residents on their blocks who also have contacts. Often issues can be worked out prior to problems developing.
The North College Block Club celebrated the completion of exterior painting at a second home on the block that had become distressed over the years. The group met and worked together and with HHA to get the city to follow up on long issued orders to the owners and success was achieved after two years. If they had ignored the problems they would still be living with them. They are masters/mistresses of their fate!

**COFFEE WITH OUR COP**

Ongoing contact with our Police Team keeps us safer. Getting to know our Community Officer at block meetings and other informal setting encourages neighbor’s involvement in crime prevention. GRPD officers are meeting with neighbors for coffee whenever invited.

Officer Rossin and the HHA Organizer met with tenants and the manager at the newly rehabbed Stuyvesant Apartments for Coffee with Our Cop. Coffee and donuts and discussion of safety inside or on the streets filled up the hour. Tenants would like to continue the conversation so we plan to meet again soon. If you have a coffee or tea pot and a few chairs you can host a Coffee with Our Cop too.

The 500 block of Prospect SE also hosted a Coffee with our Cop last spring at Suzanne DeHaans’ home. There is no set agenda for the Coffees. Officer Rossin was familiar with the block because he has been on the force for 14 years but he got a chance to meet the people who live there. Neighbors learned a lot about what to report and when, especially when it comes to suspicious activity. Call HHA if you would like to have Coffee with your Cop!

**FREE HOME SECURITY SURVEYS:** In 2014 the Crime Prevention Organizer performed nine free Home and Apartment Security Surveys for home owners and tenants. Some were victims of crime but most were interested in finding out where a prowler could get in and what could be done to stop it. The recommendations provided a detailed list of vulnerable spots and how they could be secured. This year we found a long unused door to the outside had been left unlocked for months. The owner was surprised. We also noted that at surveys of several apartments, window locks and deadbolts for doors were either missing or not functioning! With permission of the tenants we provided a copy of the recommendations to the rental owners. Survey recommendations help you prevent a burglary. **Call us at 459-8950 to set an appointment for a free survey. We can also send a copy of the recommendation to the rental owner with your permission.**

**CRIME ALERTS & UPDATES**

In 2014 the Heritage Hill Association sent out 20 E-Alerts through our E-Mail Network to neighbors on crime related issues. Topics included the summer increase in burglaries; thefts from locked and unlocked vehicles and how to prevent them; suspicious activity and how to report it to the police; thefts of returnable bottles from garages, hall ways and porches; a shooting on Washington SE and updates on that crime; Block Club assistance available from HHA; community meetings with GRPD; Prowler Alerts; Bike Rider Safety; Emergency Snow Clearing; and 911 and 311 reporting tips. Neighborhood Activist Training; People’s Law School, Neighborhood Watch Tips, Burglary Prevention Information was sent and neighbors often responded with incident updates and thanks. Send your E-address, name, address and phone to us to join our E-Network at heritage@heritaghillweb.org

**HOUSING & YARD CONDITIONS**

In 2014 we assisted neighbors who reported concerns about deterioration of housing or of grounds around homes and businesses. Most properties in the area are well kept but with several absentee owned buildings housing code violations had become noticeable.
This year we have worked with tenants and owners on issues such as: tall weeds and grass; dead trees; trash and garbage carts overflowing or not picked up; “orphaned” trash carts at rentals (owners can now call the city for pick-up); peeling paint on homes, garbage, household goods and vehicles in yards, traffic issues new a school, broken steps, unpainted wood, and a driveway with huge holes. The list goes on and on. We provided information on finding owners wherever they are (in state and out), how to work with them, and if the owner won’t cooperate, how to work with the city inspectors. Clean and safe housing is our goal. Neighbors are welcome to give us a call if you have questions or need help.

BEYOND OUR BOARDERS: Heritage Hill Association Staff and Board members work with other neighborhood associations as well as with many city departments, including the police department and courts. We chair the Neighborhood Coalition that works on city-wide issues of mutual interest. The Coalition interviewed candidates for Chief of Police this spring and then met several times with the new Chief this summer and fall. We are also working with another coalition to stop legislation that will place impediments in the way of rental housing certification inspections (Senate Bill 313). We worked with to organize the 2nd Annual Neighborhood Activist Training with East Hills Council of Neighborhoods and Eastown Community Association last spring. We continue to meet on tenant rights issues with Kent County Renters Alliance. Though it is no longer staffed, the free legal clinics are still provided four times a month at the Urban League and Steeple Town Services. We are part of Good Neighbor Committee working representatives from GVSU, Aquinas, Calvin, GRCC and the GRPD, Commissioner Ruth Kelly and City Code Enforcement staff to develop a problem solving guide to assist students and their neighbors in getting along together.

Neighborhood Fun and Fund Development:
Organized and orchestrated the annual Weekend Tour of Homes in May. Recruited hosts, house captains and 243 volunteers to staff the homes and welcomed 3,100 tourists.

Organized 7th annual Garden Tour. This showcases the variety of urban gardens that are passionate private areas of our neighborhood.

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 weekly basis.

Organized the Heritage Hill Night Out Picnic at the Central High campus in August; Organized the annual Heritage Hill Neighborhood-Wide Yard Sale Day in June; the Holiday Potluck and Annual Meeting in December and the fun WHAM wine, beer tasting, art auction in November.

Texas Hold-em - Staffed 4 gaming events at TJ’s Game Room throughout 2014.
HHA Staff Rearranged: Our best afternoon receptionist, Willhelmia Daniels retired in October, Tansy Harris, our energetic and social media expert was hired in October to assist all office needs.

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

And we carry on in 2015 and work with you to make Heritage Hill the best it can be. We welcome all new neighbors in 2014 and encourage you to get active in your neighborhood. We have a place for you!