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.

In 2015, Heritage Hill was recognized by the Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association for its participation in Re//STATE and awarded with a Planning Excellence Award for Grassroots Initiative. This honor was shared with the Re//STATE partners: Friendly Corps, Williams & Works, and Downtown Grand Rapids, INC. for the 2-day visioning, staging event of the State Street Corridor.

**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 2015, 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 2016 is May 21 and 22.

The Heritage Hill Garden Tour: The Garden Tour rotates from the south to north every year so the 2016 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 2016.

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 the first Tuesday in August; the Holiday Potluck and Annual Meeting is typically the first week in December. The Association also invites neighbors to hold 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 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 2015:

LAND USE ISSUES:

• 50 College SE: This large and vacant commercial parcel that was home to the Social Security Administration office is for sale. Inquiries for potential re-development have been posed
in the last couple years although no specific proposals have ever been presented. With the likelihood of development at this site, the Association determined it would be best to be pro-active and compile what could be accepted uses at this site. Neighbors’ planning meetings were conducted in winter and spring of 2015 and neighbor facilitators produced the final report that the HHA Board adopted in August. This report is a vision of what neighbors and the Association may support to guide and judge potential development plans.

- **Pleasant Park** became the much needed neighborhood gathering green spot in 2015. Neighbors created the Pleasant Park pals Facebook page to stay connected and engaged; planted the perennial garden that edges the Pleasant Street border, hosted planned and spontaneous events including the Association’s ice cream social, and a myriad of activities such as yoga, dog trainings, kite flying, sledding, ball games, Frisbee flying and everything play for all ages. A true public space embraced by its community.

- **State Street**: The Dyer Ives Foundation approved funding of the Association’s request for community organizing activities outlined in the Association’s State Street Corridor Area Specific Plan. Activities this year include:
  - State Street Corridor Area Specific Plan was adopted unanimously by the City of Grand Rapids Commissioners on July 28, 2015 and incorporated into the City’s Master Plan.
  - Launched Facebook State Street page with new logo to identify State Street as an identity: [www.facebook.com/statestreetGR?ref=hl](http://www.facebook.com/statestreetGR?ref=hl)
  - Set up a meeting with the residents of the Stuyvesant Apartments. Discussed the State Street Corridor Plan pertaining to business growth on State Street and what they would like to see happen in this corridor. These meetings will continue.
  - Met with Executive Pastor Reverend David Baak from Westminster Presbyterian Church to discuss the State Street Corridor Plan. Westminster is eager to see growth in this area and promised parishioners are eager to help.
  - Met with the President of Mercy Health, Bill Manns, and other Mercy Health professionals to discuss the State Street Corridor Plan. Talked a great deal about the surface parking lots along State Street.
  - 345 State Street Apartments opens, managed by Live Downtown.
  - Started ongoing meetings with HQ, a teen runaway drop-in center at 320 State Street SE and have built a strong working relationship.
  - The State Street Corridor Plan was used to shape the Downtown Development Authority’s reconstruction of State Street from Jefferson to Lafayette. Brick pavers, variety of trees, new sidewalks and bike paths were incorporated into the DDA’s plan. The street is now bricked, trees planted and lights installed but not on as of yet. Weather has gotten in the way of having them completed as of yet.
  - Worked with Westminster, Azkoul Productions and HQ as partners for our first Block Party on October 16, 2015 at Foster Park. Aimed to connect the community as well as making the teen drop-ins from HQ feel ownership of the neighborhood. Activities included: food, music, goats and crafting. Well over 300 hotdogs, 250 homemade treats, smoked meats and other donated food was eaten. Talks are already in the works for another in 2016.
  - Bi-monthly articles in the Heritage Hill Herald about State Street.
  - Compiled a list of all properties within the State Street Corridor and owners.
  - Won the 2015 Planning Excellence Award for Grassroots Initiative from the American Planning Association of Michigan for RE//State, Build a Better Block.
  - Continue to work with our community officer on hotspot issues along State Street.

- **Potpourri of land use**: The Association 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 2015 the Association was involved in the following:
516 Cherry SE: Met with new owners, Family Promise on their office relocation to this facility that was previously used by Gerontology Network. The use was similar to what had been in place so no new zoning approvals were needed.

302 East Fulton: A request to convert this former commercial office use home to a 5-unit was proposed, reviewed and supported by the Association due to its location, size, available parking, and previous use. The City’s Zoning Appeals approved the proposed use.

579 Lafayette SE: A corner property’s proposed fence was reviewed but not addressed. The position was that the Historic Preservation Commission was the appropriate body to address the materials but also the set-back location.

346 Wealthy SE: New ownership of this small building restored residential use on the 2nd floor of this commercial property. The Association supported the resumption of the residential space that brings 24/7 occupancy to this block of Wealthy Street.

GRCC Child Development Center: Assisted GRCC’s open house detailing its Child Development program and reconfiguration of its center on Fountain NE.

BRT Laker Line: RAPID reps presented overview of the new Laker BRT Line (Bus Rapid Transit) and how it will intersect at Michigan and Lafayette.

Air BnB and Cooperative Housing: Numerous conversations and monitoring of these issues. Cooperative Housing was in the news in late 2015 and cited two operating in Heritage Hill. Both of those cited in Heritage Hill are zoned and abide by their multi-family status

GRForward: Heritage Hill meetings on this Big idea plan for the downtown community continued in 2015 and the plan is now unveiled. Incredible dreams that have been only imagined in the past are taking steps to become part of the Grand Rapids excitement.

Michigan Street Corridor Plan: Continue to have conversations regarding the implementation of this Plan. Met with Spectrum Health representatives on possible reconfiguring of the Bostwick, Michigan pedestrian crossing to improve pedestrian safety.

Residential Permit Parking: The City enacted a permit parking ordinance early in 2014. Heritage Hill neighbors have been asked and the process outlined but there does not appear to be growing support for instituting a permit parking zone in Heritage Hill. It remains on option but needs a concerted effort by several adjacent blocks to pursue. The complexity of a zone appears to outweigh residents’ ability to find available parking for themselves and guests.

Tapestry Square/ICCF: The Heritage Hill Association has worked with ICCF for many, many years on development of the Wealthy Division corridor. The dream of a grocery store at this major intersection is still elusive but the marketing of this vision continues. Discussions also included the redevelopment of the Prospect, Lafayette, Wealthy corner that has life but is still waiting for funding before any plans are finalized. The condo units at the Logan, Sheldon were near completion at the end of 2015.
• **Central Campus/Schools:** As part of planning scope of GR Forward, the Central campus was re-visioned on paper. The Association’s Central campus network (neighbor representatives from each of the border blocks of the campus) reviewed possibilities that will include the demolition of the former City High building, a restructuring of traffic flow on the campus, redesigned landscaping, and construction of a connector between the GRPS Montessori (Fountain) school and Innovation Central. All plans are tentative but with the passage of the GRPS millage in 2015, the demolition of the former City High building will begin that approval process spring/summer 2016. 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 whole lot easier than relocating. The Child Discovery Center at 409 Lafayette SE is another alternative in our neighborhood to research.

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

• **Road construction:** Is the new norm for warmer months in Heritage Hill. Traffic, parking, and construction made it tough going to travel between the north and south ends of Heritage Hill in 2015. The Association responded to a variety of road construction issues identified by neighbors. The City’s road millage brought big relief to several of the worst streets. Lafayette NE is bumpy no more!

**Neighborhood Fun and Fund Development:**
- Organized and orchestrated the annual **Weekend Tour of Homes** in May. Recruited hosts, house captains and 231 volunteers to staff the homes and welcomed 3,500 tourists.
- Organized 8th 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 minimum weekly basis.

• 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 2015.

**HHA Staff Keeps Rearranging the Desks:** Barb Lester formally stepped back from her Crime Prevention Organizer position at the end of 2015 but moved to the front office for 2016. Tansy Harris is the new CPO and assumed Barb’s chair that continues to agitate.

**First Annual Neighborhood Summit:** Participated in the premiere Neighborhood Summit that brought neighborhood activists together with City Staff and GRPS reps to explore community relationships.

**Plus:** Assisted 1000’s of calls and requests regarding a multitude of quality of life issues in Heritage Hill.
And we carry on in 2016 and work with you to make Heritage Hill the best it can be. We welcome all new neighbors in 2015 and encourage you to get active with your fellow neighbors on your block and in your neighborhood. It’s your place!

**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 Gloyne. 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-scrapping 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.
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 the 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 – smiling receptionist in HHA’s front office – Barb Lester (aka Auntie Barb from now on).