

The Heritage Hill Association's 2019 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**. 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).

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Neighbor Joe Hubner comes to the rescue to make light work of spreading mulch at the annual Pleasant Park Spring Clean-up.

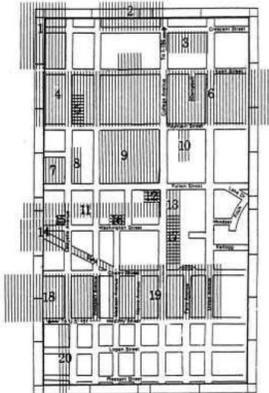
The Association's Programs: Heritage Hill is an urban neighborhood and the Association's programs inform, assist and work with neighbors to **address urban problems** -- neighborhood safety, land use conflicts, increasing traffic and parking demands, institutional expansion/construction containment, 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! Send us your email address at***

heritage@heritagehillweb.org.)

A LITTLE HISTORY:

What Could Have Happened – if not for the formation of the Heritage Hill Association



Proposed Development in HH that would have demolished 75% of HH structures:

1. Butterworth Hospital Expansion
2. Calvary Undenominational Expansion
3. Netherlands Reformed Church Expansion
4. College Park Urban Renewal
5. Apartment Development
6. Future College Park Expansion
7. Masonic Temple Expansion
8. Synagogue Expansion
9. Davenport College Expansion
10. Central Reformed Church Expansion
11. Weston Extension
12. Real Estate development
13. Proposed motel
14. Public Museum Expansion
15. Real Estate development
16. Real Estate development
17. Private development
18. Washington Square Urban Renewal
19. Saint Mary's development
20. Board of Education expansion

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. And in 2018 – We celebrated our 50 years of service to Heritage Hill – and they said it wouldn't last.

OUR SERVICES:

The Crime Prevention Program is provided to increase neighborhood safety with services that activate neighbors in **Neighborhood Watch and Block Club Organizing**. Key components include free home security surveys, personal



HHA's Community Officer playing ping-pong with the kids at Pleasant Park.

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 2019, 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.

The Neighborhood Improvement Program addresses quality of life issues that are not crime related. Its purpose is to generate resident involvement, to educate, train and encourage activism to protect and strengthen the Heritage Hill neighborhood; to bridge commercial development with the residential nature; and to resolve issues of concern. Issues commonly include land use, traffic and parking, institutional expansion, neighborhood schools, etc. Additional elements include educating, referring and assisting residents with available City/community services and resources and implementing 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.



Local High School students worked in tended an overgrown area of Pleasant Park for their Annual Day of Service in 2019.

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 Public Safety and Neighborhood Improvement programs. It also promotes our architectural heritage and neighborhood as a great place to live, work and visit! The date for **2020 is May 16 and 17.**



The Heritage Hill Garden

Tour: A fun-raiser for Heritage Hill gardeners, the Garden Tour is held

nearly every year. It is currently being planned for 2020. Please consider opening your quiet space the third weekend in June. Please call or email the office and we can add your garden to the lineup!

Social Events: The Association hosts two annual neighborhood wide events to gather neighbors together. The **Neighborhood Night Out social** 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. Beyond the Association's events, neighbors gather for



HH Mascot, Tom the Turkey [was recently spotted in the south end.](#) [He'd been MIA for nearly 6 months.](#)



20 Gay Ave was open for Tour in 2019 to the delight of many. The built-in pipe organ was a hit!

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backyard movie nights, evening concerts, yoga, tai chi, dance classes and all kinds of fun at Pleasant Park, block parties and whatever a connected community dreams up.

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 requests. Common questions regard historic preservation guidelines, apartments for rent, ... 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 ... where do I vote, etc., etc, etc. We welcome you to call, email and we welcome you to come visit too.

Make sure you stay in the know and are engaged! If you are not receiving our emails, please send us yours to heritage@heritagehillweb.org. Also like us on Facebook.



HHA's long serving Executive Director Jan Earl retired in October, 2019. The HHA Board kidnapped her for a *bon voyage* surprise gathering and Grand Lady boat trip on the Grand River. Accolades from the City, County, and neighbors were presented. Thank you Jan for your 36 years of service to our neighborhood. Jan is continuing in 2020 in a very limited role as mentor to new director Amanda Cormier.



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THE ASSOCIATION AND NEIGHBORS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2019:

Land Use issues:

- **200 Madison SE:** Met with architect and owner/developer of the currently vacant 200 Madison (formerly Faith Ministry church) regarding plans for a 22-unit housing development. Organized info session for neighbors to learned about the proposed development. Construction should start mid 2020.
- **Cornerstone Church:** Invited neighbors to meeting at the Church, 48 Lafayette SE, to review plans for an addition to the church which is currently under construction and near completion.
- **GRCC Tech Building:** Adjacent neighbors met many times with GRCC representatives in hopes to minimize impact on berm/hill that will be virtually



Neighbors gather at Pleasant Park to prioritize upgrades that will be happening in 2020.

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replaced by a wall to afford the 25' utility easement necessary in the expansion of the Tech Building.

- **33 Union NE:** Worked in concert with the Historic Preservation Commission to make needed repairs to this vacant home. The City approved [the](#) Demolition by Neglect process and [the](#) funds [needed](#) to stabilize this house. The City's expenses [are now a](#) lien against the property. The exterior has been painted, repaired and brought into compliance with the city code.
- **Residential Permit Parking:** Changes to the City's process in establishing permit parking zones may see a zone request in Heritage Hill in 2020. If and when a zone district is proposed, neighbors will be surveyed and a public hearing will be held. Stay tuned.
- **Parks:** Worked with the GR Parks Department regarding improvements to both Pleasant and Foster Parks. Neighbors gathered to provide input to the city for improvements coming in 2020 for
- **Maintained a communication network** with each of our neighboring hospitals, colleges and universities, and neighborhood associations, businesses. Met with Mercy Health Saint Mary's new President, Dr. Kim to welcome him and to continue strong working relationship on areas of common interest; met with MaryFree Bed's CEO Kent Riddle to improve communications and strengthen interactions; various GRCC meetings, conversations on the college's development plans and input.
- [Met with and reviewed possible plans for redevelopment of Circle K Gas Station on Michigan Street as well as Mercy Health campus plans on Cherry Street. Stay tuned in 2020 for more!](#)
- **Preservation:** Co-hosted with the GR Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) a window's workshop to teach attendees how to fix broken cords, glazing and installation. Also partnered with HPC on a new resident information workshop. Applauded HPC 2019 Award recipients.

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Neighborhood Fun and Fund Development:

- Organized and orchestrated the annual **Weekend Tour of Homes** in May. Recruited hosts, house captains and 223 volunteers to staff the homes and welcomed 2,000 tourists.
- Compiled and produced 6 issues of the **Heritage Herald** that were distributed to 4,500 neighbors and friends.
- Produced and updated the apartment listings on a minimum weekly basis.
- Received the City of Grand Rapids' **Neighborhood Match Fund** grant to provide breakfast lunch and a multitude of yard games for the Spring Clean-up day in April and paddles & balls to keep at the ping-pong table.
- Organized the annual Heritage Hill **Neighborhood-Wide Yard Sale Day** and **Garden Tour** in June; Organized the **National Night Out** at Pleasant Park in August; Organized the Heritage Hill **Dumpster Day** in October which we hope to make an annual event; and the **Holiday Potluck and Annual Meeting** in December.

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Plus: Assisted hundreds of calls and requests regarding a multitude of quality of life issues in Heritage Hill.

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Public Safety Issues in 2019:

Every individual who lives or works in Heritage Hill helps our community stay safe and healthy. Without each of you, we simply would not be the thriving community that we are.

New neighbors: Heritage Hill Association (HHA) can help you keep your house, apartment, or business safe from thieves with our FREE Home Security Survey. Call 616-459-8950 to schedule 30 minutes with us to survey your home for some simple tips. Renters, you have specific rights that we can help you identify, as well.



The new HHA team – Executive Director Amanda Cormier, left and Barbara Draughon, right, the Association's new Crime Prevention Organizer. Barbara took over for Amanda when she moved into Jan Earl's position.

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Crime:

A recurring theme during 2019 was breaking & entering into cars and garages. Contrary to the term, one does not need to "break" anything to commit the crime of

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“breaking & entering”. A significant majority of these crimes were committed against unlocked cars and garages. Please do not leave doors unlocked or things of PERCEIVED value in cars or unsecured garages. This not only puts you at risk of someone rummaging through or stealing your property, but it puts your neighbors at risk by encouraging thieves to “keep trying” until they find that unlocked door! Do not enable criminals. Make it hard and eventually they just might give up or move on. Also, with the increasing convenience of mail ordering, porch pirates hit the City hard this year. Get to know your neighbors and make arrangements with one another to receive or otherwise take care of delivered packages.

We also received reports of panhandlers arriving at all hours of the day and night at residential doorsteps asking for money. Do not answer the door if you do not know the person and DO call the police if you feel threatened.

Nextdoor.com: Heritage Hill Association loves all the ways we can build our community via social media.

Nextdoor.com has become a popular means to achieve this. However, we have noticed that many use it as an alternative to calling the police when cars are broken into or the contents of an Amazon box is suspiciously strewn over a front yard. Please do not skip the step of reporting these to the GRPD at 616-456-3400 or 911. You might feel it is too insignificant to call GRPD, but please know that these calls do not go unnoted and they definitely help the police identify trends and reunite owners with their goods.

Seven businesses located in Heritage Hill received information on how to register their security cameras with CityWatchGR. This voluntary program helps to reduce crime by serving as an “extra pair of eyes” for the police department as it works to investigate local crimes. Please call us if you’re interested!

Dog owners and their handlers were reminded to be considerate by picking up after their dogs in public areas and keeping all dogs on leash in public areas regardless of breed, temperament, age, etc.

An indecent exposure incident occurred mid-summer when a woman was walking her dog in the morning on the south end. A man grabbed her arm and exposed himself to her. She was able to get away and call the police. We quickly alerted neighbors to use caution while walking in the area.

Traffic Calming:

A neighbor was extremely fortunate to walk away from being hit by a car in a cross walk at College and Fulton. The car was turning right on red despite the presence of the pedestrian in the crosswalk who had the right of way. The Traffic Safety Department of the City of Grand Rapids worked with us to get a “No Turn on Red” sign at College and Fulton and re-training of Rapid bus drivers to heed the new traffic pattern. Crosswalks and walk signals were updated and improved at this intersection.

With some positive neighbor engagement, 4-way flashing red traffic lights have been installed as permanent fixtures to the intersection at Lyon and Union NE.

Many users of Pleasant Park had inquired about the traffic speed and safety at the Madison and Pleasant St. intersection. The Heritage Hill Association worked with neighbors to approach GRPD about conducting a speed study. The results of the study revealed that the average speed is 27MPH and would need further discussion with relevant departments within the City before any alterations are made to the streets or traffic around the park. Speed limit signs will go in on the north end of College after a neighbor petitioned for a study at that section of College and found that proper signage was lacking. This is important as the traffic on the north end of college is connected to access to I-196.

[THANK YOU to everyone who got involved, participated in community-building, served on a board, came to a gathering, lifted up a neighbor in need or worked on resolving an issue in 2019. YOU continue to make Heritage Hill a great place to live, work and play!](#)



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