

The Heritage Hill Association's 2020 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.**

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. These are ingredients to a neighborhood where we all want to live, work, and play!

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:

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. Today this plan continues to be updated and guides the Association and the City regarding life in the neighborhood. A 200-300 Prospect Plan, the State Street Corridor Area Specific Plan, and the 50 College SE development report are additional planning guidelines developed by the Association and neighbors.

OUR SERVICES:

The Crime Prevention Program helps to increase neighborhood safety with services that activate neighbors. Key components include free home security surveys, personal safety information, victim assistance, and producing and distributing crime information alert/e-alert notices and fliers. In recent history, 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 neighborhood programs, including those of 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.

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 view 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.



Home Plaques: The iconic Heritage Hill plaques are available at the HHA office. They cost \$35 and are sold as a fundraiser as well as promoting neighborhood pride! Stop over and pick one up for your house. The only requirement is that the plaque be displayed on a house in Heritage Hill.

Community Connectivity: The Association produces the *Heritage Herald*, a bi-monthly newsletter 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, Instagram, 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 and follow us on Facebook @heritagehill and Instagram @heritagehillassociation.

We can also be found on the internet www.heritagehillweb.org where the association 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 Weekend Tour of Homes

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 2020 tour was cancelled due to COVID. The prospect for a **2021 Tour is under review by the board.**

The Heritage Hill Garden Tour: Another fundraiser for Heritage Hill, the Garden Tour is held nearly every year. It was cancelled for 2020 due to COVID and the 2021 tour is scheduled for **June 19** and will feature festive activities as well as gardens. Please consider opening your quiet space. 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. In non-COVID times, 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. To encourage getting out and about during COVID, the Association hosted several walking tours of the neighborhood and nearby sites of interest. Beyond the Association's events, neighbors gather for 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 include 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 come visit us (once COVID is under better control)!

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.

THE ASSOCIATION AND NEIGHBORS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2020:

Land Use issues:

- **GRCC:** Met with Historic Preservation Commissioners and GRCC staff to review plans for new outdoor signage to provide better direction for pedestrian traffic on and between the 2 campuses. The goal is to ensure the integrity of being located in a residential and historic district. New signage should be implemented in early 2021.
- **Parks:** Worked with the GR Parks Department regarding improvements to both Pleasant and Foster Parks. Beginning conversations with GR Parks to make improvements to Heritage Hill Park using millage funds set aside for the park.
- **Maintained a communication network:** Attended townhalls hosted by Mercy Health and Spectrum Health to keep up to date on COVID trends.
- **Preservation:** Attended Historic Preservation Day in Lansing to express our support of Senate Bill 54 to restore the historic preservation tax credit (more info in this issue of the Heritage Herald) and continued to work with lawmakers to help push the bill through. Lansing announced the success of our efforts before the new year and we can look forward to details in the coming months as this bill takes effect for the 2021 tax season!

Neighborhood Fun and Fund Development:

- Via social media and newsletter, showcased many homes and businesses who demonstrated their support of local healthcare workers with holiday lights strung on shrubs in April and signs of support hung in windows.
- 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.
- Hosted the Spring Clean-up day in April where neighbors masked up to pick up litter from our sidewalks and streets as well as lay mulch and other seasonal duties at our local parks.
- Organized the **National Night Out:** instead of the typical potluck picnic (hard to do safely distanced), the board organized walking tours and encouraged lighting porch lights. We conducted an alternative to the typical **Holiday Potluck and Annual Meeting** in December by taking it online. The Commons restaurant helped us celebrate a sense of community by offering menu discounts and raffle items for those who attended the virtual meeting.

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

Public Safety Issues in 2020:

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.

- **B&E:** A recurring theme during 2020 (and the last decade) continues to be breaking & entering into cars and garages. Contrary to the term, one does not need to "break" anything to commit the crime of "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.

- Illegal use of fireworks was rampant this year, not only in our city, but across the nation. There are so many people suffering from afflictions such as PTSD who depend on and prepare for days fireworks are legally used. When individuals break the law and launch fireworks outside of these prescribed days and times, it reduces the quality of life for so many to nearly zero. GRPD needs our help to act within the law or report specific addresses that are breaking it. It is hard for them to locate the offenders without a specific address.
- Not unrelated, calls of “shots fired” significantly increased this year. Even if the guns were not shot from within the boundaries of Heritage Hill, their sound can ring far and near. Please do not skip the step of reporting these to the GRPD at 616-456-3400 or 911.
- Unfortunately, just before everyone was preparing to celebrate the holidays (a much needed respite from 2020), we learned of the first victim of murder in Heritage Hill since our collective memories can recall. GRPD identified it as a targeted hit (by gunfire) and not a public threat. The suspect was quickly apprehended and further details will continue to surface as their investigations proceed. This has been a year of record crime in our city that we hope does not repeat.
- Lastly, another remnant of 2020, is the problem of graffiti throughout the city. Heritage Hill was not immune and was hit quite hard. Public and private properties were hit by graffiti vandals. A team of dedicated volunteers worked with the HHA and the City to report and remove many of these eyesores.
- Several neighbors who live on/near or frequent the College Ave NE and Lafayette NE corridors complained of speeding and lack of MPH signs. HHA worked with the City to get signs installed. Those along College have been installed and those on Lafayette are scheduled for installation in the early part of 2021.
- Many users of Pleasant Park continue to inquire about the traffic speed and crossing safety at the Madison and Pleasant St. intersection. Though the GRPD conducted a speed study in 2019 which revealed an average speed of 27MPH, neighbors still find it hazardous and the HHA continues to monitor that intersection and identify solutions with the City.
- The parking restrictions on Morris Ave SE were changed to better accommodate the safe passage of emergency and snow-removal vehicles and reduce damage to personal property/parked cars.

ADMINISTRATION

Where 2019 saw the departure of long-time HHA Executive Director, Jan Earl, 2020 was the year that Barb Lester decided to retire after 34 years with us. Also, COVID put new demands on Amanda Cormier at home



which led her decision to return to her original position with HHA as the Public Safety Organizer. The board later voted to move Barbara Draughon into the permanent position of Executive Director. Maria Zache Starkey continues in her position as Office Manager for which we are ever-grateful for her institutional knowledge and calming influence during such a year of transition!

The new old HHA team – Maria Zache Starkey, Office Manager (left); Amanda Cormier, Public Safety Organizer (middle); Barbara Draughon, Executive Director (right)

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 2020. YOU continue to make Heritage Hill a great place to live, work and play!











