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Feb. 15

FutureHeights
2843 Washington Blvd. #105
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118

A roadmap to electing a new CH mayor

Tony Cuda

On Nov. 2, Cleveland Heights residents, for the first time, will directly elect their mayor.

In November 2019, voters overwhelmingly approved (with 64 percent voting in favor) the Issue 26 charter amendment, changing the city's form of government to a mayor-council structure from what had been a council-city manager form.

The new mayor—who will now be directly elected by the city's voters, rather than chosen by the city's council members from among their own ranks—will appoint a professional administrator to help run the city, and work alongside CH City Council.

In the lead-up to the fall election, detailed below are some key dates and provisions of the new charter amendment regarding the process of electing a new CH mayor.

The mayor: The mayor is elected in a non-partisan race every four years, beginning in 2021, with



On Nov. 2, CH voters will directly elect a mayor, for the first time in the history of the city.

no term limits. The mayor serves as full-time CEO of Cleveland Heights, and as the city's safety director. (The safety director is an unpaid role for the mayor. It was formally the role of the city manager.)

The mayoral salary, as set by CH City Council in fall 2020, is \$115,000, plus benefits. The mayor can veto legislation; council can override a veto with five or more votes.

A candidate must live in Cleve-

land Heights for at least 18 months prior to Election Day, be at least 18 years old, and be a registered voter.

The city council: The charter amendment did not change CH City Council's makeup or function. It continues to comprise seven people, elected at-large, for four-year terms.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2021, the president of council can no longer also use the honorific title of "mayor," as the

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Noble Neighbors' employ COVID Creativity



In 2020 Noble Neighbors supported Start Right CDC Hunger Center.

Brenda H. May

Noble Neighbors responded to adversity with creativity in 2020. While COVID-19 necessitated restricted gatherings, it exposed overwhelming generosity.

Springtime planning for the

annual "We Are Noble" festival was suspended with the Ohio stay-at-home orders. In those early days of the pandemic, restriction horizons were discussed as weeks or perhaps a month of inconvenience. When it became clear that Ohio might not

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Neighborhood Mini-Grants program expands to UH

Sruti Baz

The FutureHeights Neighborhood Mini-Grants program is now available for projects in both Cleveland Heights and University Heights.

"We are excited to be able to support the grassroots work of our neighbors in University Heights," said Deanna Bremer Fisher, executive director of FutureHeights. "We support one another in many ways already, and share a school and library system. This is another opportunity to strengthen our interconnected communities."

To date, the Neighborhood Mini-Grants program has provided a total of \$30,386 to 47 projects in Cleveland Heights. Funded projects range from gardening and beautification, to community and social services.

"Projects are driven by residents and neighborhood groups who know their neighborhoods' needs and assets intimately," said Fisher. "In 2021, we'd love to support more projects led by new voices, such as teens, young adults and those under 35."

Applications for the spring round of grant-making are due by 5 p.m. on Monday, March 15. The fall deadline is Sept. 15.

The program, which began in fall 2015, provides funding of up to \$1,000 to grassroots or neighborhood groups in Cleveland Heights and University Heights that have ideas for creative solutions, projects, and programs that build on and enhance existing assets in their neighborhoods.

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LEI builds community in time of isolation

Eli Millette

In late March 2020, Lake Erie Ink (LEI) was presented with a problem: After almost a decade of providing creative expression opportunities across Greater Cleveland, a global pandemic disrupted in-person programs.

In response, LEI facilitated a new program series—Creative Community Challenges—to address the increased need for community-building and creative expression during a time of social isolation. LEI called for and gathered submissions from throughout the com-



Storefront display from the "Transformations . . ." Creative Community Challenge.

munity, and published them in bound anthologies. To further the program's

reach, LEI also worked with the Cov-

continued on page 2

Letters Policy

The *Heights Observer* welcomes letters to the editor. They must be submitted electronically, along with the writer's name, phone number and e-mail address, to: www.heightsobserver.org/members.

HEIGHTS OBSERVER

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About the Observer

The *Heights Observer* is not an ordinary newspaper; it is a nonprofit publication for residents of Cleveland Heights and University Heights.

The *Observer* has no writing staff; it is written by you—the readers.

Individuals throughout the community decide what stories they want to write, then submit them for publication. Anyone in University Heights or Cleveland Heights is welcome to contribute regularly, occasionally or even just once.

Is there something you think should be covered in the *Heights Observer*? If so, please write it on your own, or with friends, neighbors or colleagues. Our volunteer editors will make sure it's ready to publish and contact you with any questions.

If you're writing a news article, it should be clear and factual. If you want to express an opinion, submit it as a letter to the editor or an opinion piece. Either way, make sure it's about something specific to our two cities.

- To make a submission of any kind, go to www.heightsobserver.org and click on "Member Center" at the left.
- For information about writing style, article length, etc., click on "Become an Observer" at the left. For questions that aren't answered there, call the FutureHeights office at 216-320-1423 or e-mail info@futureheights.org.

Articles to be considered for the March issue must be submitted by Feb. 8. We publish some articles online as they come in—and still consider them for the next print issue. We also publish an e-newsletter each Tuesday.

Heights Observer's election policy: more—and less—of the same



OPENING
THE OBSERVER

Kim Sergio Inglis

In this year's Nov. 2 general election, Cleveland Heights voters will elect a mayor for the first time in the city's history. If more than two mayoral candidates file valid petitions (with the required number of signatures) with the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections by the June 16 deadline, CH voters will first narrow the field in a Sept. 14 primary election.

In addition, three CH City Council seats, three UH City Council seats, and three CH-UH Board of Education seats will be on the Nov. 2 ballot.

In past local-election years, the *Heights Observer's* election policy limited contributions by candidates to online-only publication in the month or two prior to the November election. The intent was to manage the potential of having more last-minute submissions from candidates than we could publish in limited print space. At the same time, the policy put no such limitation on candidates' supporters. So, what was to prevent a spokesperson or supporter from acting as the voice of a candidate?

In looking ahead at this year's potentially denser local-election schedule, and likely more-crowded field of candidates, the *Heights Ob-*

server's advisory committee decided on a different approach—one that doesn't prohibit submissions from candidates at any point:

Heights Observer Election Policy

"The *Heights Observer* will review election-related submissions with a goal of providing fair and equitable access for those seeking office.

"Candidates for office are expected to identify themselves as such when submitting anything for publication.

"Candidates' supporters and campaign representatives, and anyone writing about any candidate or election issue, are expected to disclose any personal or professional relationship they may have with any candidate, or with the subject of their submission. These disclosures are intended to inform *Heights Observer* review, and will be disclosed to readers when relevant.

"The *Heights Observer* will determine whether and when submissions will run in print, online, or both.

"Contributions by and about candidates, and any election issue, are limited to a maximum of 400 words.

"The *Heights Observer* does not endorse candidates, nor does FutureHeights, the nonprofit community-development corporation that publishes the *Heights Observer*."

Besides the change in word-count limit, the rest of what is detailed in the policy is, in practice, how we already operate. For example, we

regularly receive more articles in any given month than we can accommodate in print. Some articles, inevitably, are published online only.

We publish opinions on all sides of an issue, provided we hear from all sides. If you feel your point of view is not represented in the *Heights Observer's* pages, write and submit an opinion.

We ask that *all* contributors disclose any personal or professional connections to a subject they write about. When they don't, and we suspect there might be one, we ask; but we don't have researchers and fact-checkers to delve deep—we operate on the honor system.

The thing is, everyone who writes an article or opinion and submits it to the *Heights Observer* has some connection to the subject. If they didn't care—if, for example, they didn't feel strongly about a school levy, or want to let the community know about a volunteer effort, or a book by a Heights author, or a business success—they wouldn't take the time to write in the first place.

So, take the time to write about what concerns and interests you, whether it's an opinion or an article. The *Heights Observer's* success as a community forum relies on the contributions it receives from all members of the Heights community.

Kim Sergio Inglis is editor-in-chief of the Heights Observer, and is a Cuyahoga County master gardener volunteer.

LEI continued from page 1

entry Village Special Improvement District to organize a pop-up public art display, in an empty storefront window, of the writing and visual art submitted as part of the project.

Although LEI is typically youth-oriented, organizers opened the program to the general community, receiving submissions from young people as well as from community members who had not previously been aware of LEI's existence. Participants ranged in age from 9 to 91.

The first submission drive, which ran from June to August 2020, was themed "One Summer Day . . .". This thematic prompt was selected to encourage reflection and be accessible to a diverse population. During the first round, more than 50 individuals submitted their creative work.

Through Creative Community Challenges, LEI created a unique community bond. Commenting on being part of the project, one participant noted, "I'm trying hard to speak from an authentic perspective. I just love words, the sounds they make, and the imagery and emotion they conjure. This is all new. I've been spending decades doing other things. To

be in the anthology is thrilling."

The current challenge theme—a prompt created by LEI's teen editorial board—aims to tackle a question on many people's minds: "What's on the other side?" With fear and uncertainty leading the way into 2021, LEI hopes to promote honest reflection on what kind of impact our present will have on our future.

To participate in LEI's current Creative Community Challenge, respond to the theme "What's on the Other Side?" with a piece of original work (writing, photography, painting, etc.) and share it online, or deliver it in person or by mail to LEI's office (2843 Washington Blvd., Cleveland Heights, 44118). The Web address to submit online is <https://form.jotform.com/210035079119146>. If you experience any problems in submitting, or have any questions, send an e-mail to creativecommunitychallenge@gmail.com, or call 216-320-4757.

Submissions will be open until Feb. 19.

Eli Millette works as the communications and outreach director at Lake Erie Ink, and lives in Cleveland Heights.

School board should save Millikin wetlands

To the Editor:

I have seen the rooftop of the stable of the old Severance estate from Severance Circle for years now, so last month I decided to take a drive by Millikin school to see firsthand the property over which there has been so much controversy. What I found was possibly the last little hidden gem left in Cleveland Heights. (Michael Morse's and Jim Miller's opinions in the December 2020 *Heights Observer* gave me even more insight into this little oasis. Check out Jim Miller's YouTube videos on Dugway Brook!) The stable has a fairly new roof and appears to be structurally sound.

While I have no objection to new development in the Heights, we can all see from the architecturally unattractive and inappropriate development of the Top of the Hill project that the city hasn't the ability to do the job correctly.

Therefore, I would implore the school board to retain ownership of the property, continue to use the old school and stable for storage, and continue the situation as it stands. In the future, with a more robust economy, perhaps both sides of that wetlands can be tastefully developed, leaving the last little gem of Cleveland Heights just as it should remain.

Seriously, [if the school board wants] to sell this property for \$1, I'll pay \$1 to keep it as it is.

Steven Rowsey
Cleveland Heights

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Are all welcome in Cleveland Heights?

Naomi Stern

I am writing in response to the opinion piece by Eric J. Silverman, “Former BOE member feels Millikin déjà vu,” in the December 2020 *Heights Observer*. Although I have only been a resident of Cleveland Heights for the past six years, my husband’s family has lived here for almost

Resident files civil complaint against CH City Council

To the Editor:

On Jan. 8, the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas accepted my complaint—a writ of mandamus—requesting the court to compel the six members of Cleveland Heights City Council to appoint someone to the seat vacated by Melissa Yasinow’s resignation on March 2, 2020.

The CH City Charter requires them to do so. It’s been over 10 months, and, quite simply, they have quit trying.

There is something seriously wrong with this city council.

Three of their seats will be on the ballot this November: Ungar, Stein and Russell.

Garry Kanter
Cleveland Heights

70 years! To say that we are a loyal Cleveland Heights family would be an understatement. I love the diversity of Cleveland Heights, and I thought the “All Are Welcome” initiative was a very fitting way to mark the city’s centennial celebration.

As a mother of four who also works full time, I admit that I do not have much spare time to closely follow local issues related to taxes or property development. However, when someone showed me Mr. Silverman’s article, I felt very hurt. I would like to give Mr. Silverman the benefit of the doubt, and I hope that he did not intend his words to come across the way they did. However, the tone of his article made me feel that perhaps the Orthodox Jewish community, which I am proud to be a part of, is actually NOT welcome in Cleveland Heights. I thought we were a valued part of a diverse and welcoming city—are we just a “special-interest group”?

Surely there is nothing wrong with religious schools looking to purchase land or property, is there? Surely there is nothing illegal about being interested in unoccupied lots in close proximity to the current school and its families, is there? Surely there is nothing sinister about purchasing a property for a school that has woods included and not using *all* of the land for the campus, is there? Why is Mr. Silverman surprised that the families

and institutions located in close proximity to the neglected Millikin campus are interested in seeing it put to better use?

I am sorry to hear that there are also empty lots at Noble-Nela, Noble-Mayfield, Lee-Meadowbrook, etc. I am sure that the families and communities living near those locations also care about *that* land being put to good use. I hope they are fortunate enough to have individuals, such as Jessica Cohen, who *do* find the time in their busy schedules to join various committees and advocate for changes that they feel would benefit their neighborhood, and—by extension—the city as a whole. Growth in any part of Cleveland Heights should be celebrated, should it not?

Personally, I do *not* want to see the Millikin property developed into large single-family homes. Everyone is entitled to his/her opinion. I believe the city as a whole, and particularly the residents in close proximity to the property, should be able to hear arguments for and against any new proposal, and be able to voice their preferences. Please remember that families who choose to send their children to religious schools continue to pay property taxes. Should they not be able to give input into how their tax money is being spent?

I am glad to hear that the school district is filling a great need by using Millikin for trades and bulk storage.

If so, should it not be taking better care of the property? If caring for that property is too much to manage, perhaps the board should more actively search for “a new home for the district’s trades” which would not require the same level of maintenance. In any case, I wish Mr. Silverman would have expressed his support for the current use of the Millikin property in a more tactful way.

Naomi Stern is a mother of four and a full-time speech-language pathologist in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Her children are third-generation students at the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland.



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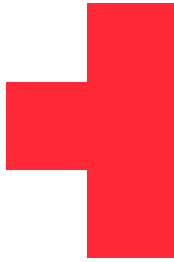
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COVID-19 and CH Municipal Court

J.J. Costello

We have all had to adjust and re-examine how best to carry out our everyday activities this past year. This public health emergency has also impacted Ohio courts, including Cleveland Heights Municipal Court (CHMC). There have been many challenges, but CHMC has adapted and responded to the COVID-19 crisis. Our focus has been on protecting the health of the staff and all those who enter the courthouse, while serving our vital purpose of administering justice without denial or delay.

Shortly after Gov. DeWine first declared a state of emergency, I issued a temporary order suspending nearly all in-person hearings, including arraignments, criminal and traffic trials, and evictions.

Before the pandemic, I changed the bond so that almost all non-violent misdemeanors received personal bonds. I have since modified the court’s non-monetary personal bond schedule to include all non-violent felonies of the 4th and 5th

degrees. In addition, I suspended all warrants that, at their inception, would have a personal bond under the modified schedule.

Although the number of case filings decreased significantly (CHMC ended the year down more than 30 percent from the year prior), the work of the court never stopped; in fact, our workload increased. The staff and I had to re-think almost every process we had in place.

We acquired supplies of masks, hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies, which were initially in short supply. The halls, waiting areas, and courtrooms were marked to ensure social distancing, and signage was placed throughout, noting that masks were required. Plexiglas barriers, paid for through CARES Act funding, were installed at the check-in station and in the courtrooms. We obtained a \$93,000 grant from the Supreme Court of Ohio to upgrade our video-conferencing capabilities in the jail, probation department, and courtroom. We updated and increased the number of online forms available to the general public, and are in the process of switching vendors to make the online payment of fines and costs more efficient and less costly to defendants.

Even while I halted in-person hearings temporarily, we found ways to continue to adjudicate cases. For example, before the pandemic, criminal and traffic pre-trials were conducted with attorneys and defendants appearing in-person. Now, those pre-trials are conducted via telephone. Similarly, whenever possible, our updated video-conferencing equipment is put to use. Most plea changes and sentencings are now conducted remotely.

Though it is difficult to see this pandemic as any sort of positive, these are examples of changes for the better. No longer are attorneys and parties spending time waiting in the courthouse for their case to be called, and the defendant does not need to take time off from work to attend his or her hearing.

With all of this in place, in the middle of June, the court began thoughtfully increasing the number of in-person hearings. To avoid large numbers of litigants at any one time, we have staggered our docket times. We enforce appropriate public health guidelines, including requiring social distancing and face coverings.

I cannot say enough good things about the staff here at the court, who have tirelessly and creatively taken on the unique challenges of fulfilling their duties. Throughout all of this, the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court has continued, and will continue, to administer justice and serve this community, even if that means doing so through a mask, separated by Plexiglas.

J.J. Costello is a lifelong Cleveland Heights resident, and judge of the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court.

Groundhog Day at CH City Hall



HEIGHTS OF DEMOCRACY

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg

Jason Stein opened the first 2021 meeting of Cleveland Heights City Council by introducing himself as council president. Imagine our surprise when Council Member Mike Ungar complained that he could no longer call Stein “Mayor.” You see, the city charter amendment passed in November 2019 (Issue 26) specifies that, as of Jan. 1, 2021, the titles “mayor” and “vice mayor” no longer pertain to the president and vice president of council. The amendment’s drafters knew that many residents thought the voters already elected our mayor. If current council leaders choose to run for the new position of popularly elected mayor, they should not have the advantage of appearing to be incumbents.

Ungar went on to ask Law Director William Hanna to look into the matter; i.e., to find a loophole. Yet legally no changes can be made to a charter amendment passed by the voters, except by another vote of the people. Surely Ungar and Hanna know this, so why waste their time and our money?

We wonder, has anyone on council actually read the charter amendment?

In November 2019, we pointed out that if Issue 26 passed, council would need to actively engage in the transition to a new form of government. Six months later, in May 2020, we exhorted our elected representatives to take action. We were dismayed that council had put then-city manager Tanisha Briley in charge of planning for the change she had previously fought. We expected council to take the lead, noting:

“We want to remind council and inform residents that the charter amendment contains six provisions that take effect on Jan. 1, 2021. . . . By law, Cleveland Heights will make these changes, ready or not.”

The other five provisions cover the timing of elections, the mayor’s qualifications and salary, and other matters that must be settled so that

the first mayoral election can take place on Nov. 2, 2021. In October 2020, council did pass legislation establishing the mayor’s salary. (Additional charter changes take effect in January 2022.)

To check out the amendment for yourself, find it on the city’s website, under “Quick Links.”

In addition to preparing for a mayoral election, the city has less than a year to review its codified ordinances and make them consistent with the newly modified charter. We were not pleased to learn that Hanna has outsourced this work to former Cleveland Heights law director James Juliano, Briley’s and council’s right-hand man in fighting Issue 26.

On a brighter note: City Manager Susanna Niermann O’Neil reports that staff is preparing a “transition book” describing the workings of each department and division of the city, to be completed in February. Since Briley originally promised to deliver this document last February, we are looking forward to it. So too, we imagine, are prospective candidates for mayor.

Over the last 14 months, we and others have urged council to create a timeline of transition steps, as well as to research the experiences of other cities that have made this change and to consider how those experiences apply to Cleveland Heights.

Absent council action, some transition-related activities are happening ad hoc. Council Member Melody Hart and Citizens for an Elected Mayor (CEM) co-sponsored an excellent forum featuring three local mayors. For those who missed it, the recording is linked at www.citizensforanelectedmayor.com.

Hart also presented a second forum on Jan. 20, featuring the mayor of East Providence, R.I., which recently transitioned from a city manager to an elected mayor. Additionally, FutureHeights and CEM will sponsor “Electing Our First Mayor: Moving Cleveland Heights Forward” on Wednesday, Feb. 3, on Zoom.

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg are longtime residents of Cleveland Heights. Contact them at heightsdemocracy@gmail.com.





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MINI-GRANT continued from page 1



Millikin Neighbors' mini-grant project enhanced a playground and installed a mural.

Residents with ideas for improving their neighborhoods are invited to apply for a grant. The program is guided by a grant-making committee comprising seven Heights residents with a history of community involvement. The committee reviews and makes all grant decisions.

In addition, FutureHeights is launching an exterior home-improvement mini-grants program as an extension of its Model Block program, overseen by its FutureHomes Committee. The FutureHomes Mini-Grants program will offer small grants of up to \$500 on a rolling basis to homeowners residing in

a designated FutureHomes Model Block area. Eligible projects include exterior painting, porch repair, landscaping and other improvements visible from the street. Applicants must own and occupy their homes as a primary residence.

For more information, contact FutureHeights at info@futureheights.org. To learn about projects funded to date, and download an application, visit www.futureheights.org/programs/community-building-programs/.

Sruti Baz is the director of community-building programs at FutureHeights.

Do we stay the course or return to the classroom?



A TEACHER'S VOICE

Karen Rego

The lingering question for our schools is do we return to the classroom, or not? With the exception of some special-education students, CH-UH schools have remained remote, thus far. Last November, when COVID cases were surging, our special education students and staff returned to remote learning. At that time, many Ohio districts chose to suspend in-person learning. So, when is the right time to go back?

Remote learning is not ideal. More than anything, teachers want to be with their students. Schools, however, are unlike other businesses. We are in the business of teaching children, and this is difficult to do safely during a pandemic.

By nature, children don't "social distance," so that's out, even if space were available. Many adults have difficulty wearing a mask properly, so we can't expect children to wear them properly at all times. Teaching behind dividers is neither ideal, nor helpful, for the one-on-one instruction that many students need.

Those who want students back in classrooms believe that, because other businesses are open, schools should be, too. Remote-learning routines are not ideal, but they are working as best they can under difficult circumstances.

Could we do a hybrid model, in which some students attend school in-person two days a week, while others learn at home? If a successful hybrid model could be found, perhaps our district should go that route. Hybrid programs bring students back into the building, but working parents still need to find childcare for the other

three days a week.

Some families do not want their children to return at all, until it is safe to do so. Some staff members are at high risk for serious complications if they contract COVID.

It is difficult to teach some students in-person and hope that those at home on their computers are learning at the same rate. The hybrid model is new territory and has yet to show much success in any district that is using it.

Going to in-person, full-time teaching does not seem like an option now. COVID numbers are still high, and school personnel are next in line to be vaccinated. While we await vaccines, are schools safe enough to operate without incubating a mass outbreak? Probably not.

In-person learning should resume when COVID numbers go down, and faculty and staff have been vaccinated. Students under 16 years of age have not been approved for vaccination, which means we must protect them as best we can.

Starting a hybrid model, or bringing students back full time, could result in a surge, and then a return to remote learning. Because we are no longer required to quarantine after exposure to COVID in schools or on buses, another surge in cases would be catastrophic for our school system.

Remote instruction is where we are right now. Our teachers are working hard. Our students and their families are making it work as best they can. We all want to return to the school buildings, but only when it is safe to do so. When we know with certainty that it's safe to return, we will explore the best way to do it.

Karen Rego has taught grades K-8 in the CH-UH district, and currently provides math and language support at Monticello Middle School. She is the president of Cleveland Heights Teachers Union.

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Seeing inequities via Chromebook

Robin Koslen

Winter break is here, and this retired public-school teacher has time to reflect on being the home teacher for my granddaughter, a first-grader. I've had a Chromebook view of education in our diverse community during the pandemic. There've been conversations about the implications of educational inequality on a national scale, but educational inequality is also a problem here in the Heights.

Our district's teachers are doing a remarkable job, under difficult conditions. But remote learning is fraught with problems—devices freeze, websites don't work the way they are supposed to, and lesson plans that were triple-checked before class suddenly have issues. But the real reason I'm writing is to call attention to the glaring inequities I've observed.

Everyone is on the same device, but not everyone is in the same portal. At the beginning of the year, it was clear that some kids had more experience and greater ease with technology. Some of these same kids have parents who are technologically savvy.

Then there's the rest of us. Sure, we e-mail, we post to Facebook, and we even know how to save a document; but troubleshooters we are not. When young students have tech problems, and they all sometimes do, some caregivers can solve them, and even explain to the child how to solve the problem the next time it occurs. But some of us struggle.

Kids like my granddaughter can sit at a computer by themselves, in a quiet room, with help just a shout away. That's definitely not true for all kids. One young student does her work in daycare. When she needs help, she has to wait until someone can come to her aid. Furthermore, it's a noisy, busy atmosphere where concentration is problematic.

Some kids are in different locations on different days. Some days a kid might work from home, but on other days he may go to where mom works. If mom is working, that child is probably on his own for academic and technical issues. Mom's boss is being considerate by allowing her to bring her child to work, but work is what she has to do. That is the reality for several kids in my granddaughter's class.

Everyone's home is different, as well. If there is a toddler playing in the room, it is not quiet; materials may not be where the student left them; and mom might be busy doing laundry, or working herself. She might not notice that it is time for class to resume, so the student might arrive late, or not at all.

If dad's just gotten off working the night shift, he's not going to be the child's contact person; maybe it's an older sibling. But he's doing his own school work and needs to be left alone, so he can graduate.

This is what I've observed from the other side of the Chromebook. I know there are other issues families are coping with (economic, social isolation, health). I also know that eventually we will need to be there to help—it's what we must do if we



The author's granddaughter, Lucia Barrett, participating in first grade online.

aspire to be the community we profess to treasure.

Where do we begin? Reaching Heights has tutoring programs for different age groups. Lake Erie Ink is always looking for volunteers to work with their student writers. I do not have all the answers, but let us, as a caring community, open the discussion and keep it going until we find ways to level the playing field.

Robin Koslen, a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights, is a mom, grandma, retired teacher, full-time rebel, and an optimist.

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State legislature again defeats school-funding equity



THE COMMON GOOD

Susie Kaeser

It is hard to imagine that any school community has fought with more fervor to end EdChoice than Cleveland Heights and University Heights. EdChoice is the state program that transfers state aid from local school districts to pay for private-school vouchers, a scheme known as “deduction funding.”

The Heights Coalition for Public Education has put the state’s war on public education on the local agenda, and fostered understanding of the damaging effects of state policy on local communities—especially ours.

Forums, book discussions and research documenting the impact of this theft of public funds have helped people understand the issues and fight for remedies. Legislative resistance pushed our board of education to join a legal challenge to EdChoice.

In 2020 the Ohio Legislature finally put forth Senate Bill 305, the Fair School Funding Plan, which would have ended deduction funding. We were there to support this remedy.

In March, school board members, Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby, and carloads of parents, students and community members made the pilgrimage to Columbus to support the end of EdChoice. Multiple voices pleaded for an end to a policy that increases funding inequality and shifts the school-funding burden to local taxpayers.

After a pandemic shutdown, the legislature reconvened in December, and Sen. Matt Huffman (R-Lima) rammed through his preferred plan, which retains deduction funding and penalizes high-poverty school districts like ours.

The community mobilized again during the levy campaign to support SB 305. Kirby showed up to testify, while community members submitted testimony and joined a postcard campaign. The bill had strong bi-partisan support in both houses, and enough votes to pass. It flew through the House on a vote of 88-7 but died when Sen. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls)

refused to take up the proposal.

We lost these legislative battles, but not because of silence. There is not a legislator in Columbus who doesn’t know that vouchers are a disaster for public school students in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights district. This was not widely understood five years ago, and our efforts through these years to increase the pressure have helped keep this issue alive; but can we still win?

I have examined the data on who is most affected by the loss of public resources to EdChoice. Ninety percent of EdChoice vouchers are awarded in just 22 school districts, eight of which are in first-ring suburbs, and six of which are in Cuyahoga County. The other big losers are 14 urban districts. The majority of students enrolled in these districts are poor and children of color, and are represented by Democrats.

EdChoice is undermining education funding for the most vulnerable students. The students are defenseless because the majority of elected officials who represent them, with the notable exception of Huffman, are in the minority, too. Democrats wield little power, because Republicans hold supermajorities in both the House and Senate. Ohio students are at the mercy of policymakers who are more loyal to low state taxes and religious education than to them.

We know institutional racism is alive and well in policymaking circles. If there were a serious concern for equity and truly guaranteeing every student access to high quality education, EdChoice would be called what it is, and it would be thrown out in a second.

Unless it can ride the tide of a new fair-funding plan, a legislative remedy seems impossible. That leaves us three other bigger projects: a court case, an end to gerrymandering, and a large-scale revival of commitment to public education as a fundamental cornerstone of democracy. In my view, we need to work on all three.

Susie Kaeser is a 40-year resident of Cleveland Heights and the former director of Reaching Heights. She is active in the Heights Coalition for Public Education and the League of Women Voters.

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Cleveland Heights names new planning director

Mary Trupo

Eric Zamft is the new planning director for the city of Cleveland Heights.

In late 2020, the city conducted an extensive search for a new planning department head, to take over from Richard Wong, who retired.

The city manager and human resources director evaluated the applicants, who hailed from across the country.

“I am excited to join the Cleveland Heights community,” Zamft said. “I visited friends in Cleveland Heights a few years back and fell in love with this city. To be able to move here and help usher the city into the future is a great honor and privilege.”

“We are thrilled to welcome Eric to the team and are confident he will be up and running in no time,” said City Manager Susanna Niermann O’Neil.

Zamft, with more than 20 years of

experience in zoning, economic development, transportation, community development and housing, environmental review, sustainability, and comprehensive planning, emerged as a top candidate.

He has expertise in master plan preparation, zoning analysis, and environmental review, and is certified as a planner by the American Institute of Certified Planners.

Zamft comes to Cleveland Heights from Port Chester, N.Y., where he worked for five years in planning and economic development. He earned a master’s in city planning – land use and transportation from the University of Pennsylvania, and has been involved with city planning beginning with internships as far back as 1996.

Mary Trupo is director of communications and public engagement for the city of Cleveland Heights.

NOBLE continued from page 1

open back up until the summer (so naive in hindsight), Noble Neighbors pivoted toward a creative approach for its annual neighborhood celebration.

Noting that the festival has two main goals—to enjoy one another as neighbors and to invite others to enjoy the Noble community—the celebration launched into COVID-safe expression along four themes: show, support, serve and savor.

Neighbors showed they cared by decorating their front doors, storefronts and yards with signs of encouragement, congratulations for graduates, flags and holiday lighting.

Partnering with Start Right CDC Hunger Center, donors contributed items that were in short supply and brought in more than \$1,300 for bulk food purchases.

A litter pick-up effort during the festival weekend brought folks out to serve their neighbors, and all were invited to drive or walk the neighborhood to savor the displays of “All in This Together,” the unofficial slogan. The weekend gave neighbors an opportunity to express unity during the early days of social distancing.

Even before the weather warmed, two lot-sized projects began. At Roanoke and Noble roads, Barb Sosnowski and Laura Marks transformed a vacant lot into a public mini-park. They reconfigured a low retaining wall from a straight line into a lovely sweeping curve, planted perennials, and reconstructed a crushed-brick path into a river-rock walkway. A Little Free Library (there is another at Central Bible Baptist Church) is stocked with children’s books and surrounded by seating. A picnic table invites adults to watch over kids from a comfortable distance, and city-planted trees provide shade.

The park has become a feature

of the neighborhood. People seek out Sosnowski and Marks to tell them stories of how the space has given them peace on a chaotic day, or boosted their hope for the neighborhood. At the Noble Gardeners’ Market, which takes place in the park in August and September, sellers who grow vegetables and flowers in their backyards or community gardens provide a safe way for buyers to purchase hyper-local produce, and new sellers are always welcome. The new mini-park rarely has litter, because so many folks look after it.

Last spring, Delmore Community Orchard was established. Danialle Benham, Tom Gibson, Elsa Johnson and an army of volunteers converted an abandoned community garden into an orchard with apple, pear and paw-paw trees, berries, grapes and pollinator flowers. The orchard is open and inviting, has places to sit and relax, and exudes hope. Neighbors who had despaired of the vacant lots are now joyfully contributing to a source of pride and identity for the street. Everyone is anticipating the spring blooms of flowers and trees.

Meanwhile, Northampton Road neighbors worked with Green Paradigm Partners to establish perennial plots designed for beauty, insect health and ease of care. Soil-building started in the spring, preparing the beds for fall planting.

The year ended with a second drive for the Start Right CDC Hunger Center, and neighbors responded with overwhelming generosity, donating needed items and raising another \$1,500 for food.

Noble is home to kind, caring, creative, generous, hopeful people. Read more at www.nobleneighbors.com.

Brenda H. May is one of the leaders of Noble Neighbors.

MAYOR continued from page 1

previous charter had allowed. The council president will continue to be selected by his or her fellow council members.

The city administrator: The city administrator is a new position that replaces the former position of city manager, who had been appointed by council. The city administrator is appointed by the mayor, with confirmation by a simple majority of council, to oversee city operations. The administrator must be a qualified professional.

The timeline:

- March 18: Candidates for mayor can begin pulling petitions from the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections (BOE), and begin collecting signatures to be on the ballot. Candidates need 222 valid signatures to qualify, according to the BOE. This is 180 days before the Sept. 14 primary election.
- June 16: Candidates must submit petitions to the BOE no later than June 16. This is 90 days before the Sept. 14 primary election.
- Sept 14: A non-partisan primary election will be held, as allowed

for in the charter amendment, if three or more mayoral candidates are certified eligible to run. The top two primary vote-getters will then face off in the Nov. 2 general election. The BOE can take up to 21 days to certify a vote, but generally does so sooner.

- Nov. 2: The date of the general election.
- Jan. 1, 2022: The mayor is sworn in.

There are three CH Council seats that will be up for election on Nov. 2. They are currently occupied by Davida Russell, Jason Stein, and Michael Ungar. If any of the three are considering a run for mayor, they can pull petitions for both city council and mayor on March 18, but must decide on or before June 16 for which race they will file a petition. A candidate can only run for one office at a time, because the filing deadlines for city council and mayor are the same.

Tony Cuda is the former campaign manager for Citizens for an Elected Mayor, and is part of the CEM Transition Subcommittee.

Cleveland Heights City Council Meeting highlights

DECEMBER 21 and 30, 2020

These were two short, special meetings, each with a single action. Attendance at both was the same: Council Members Jason Stein (Mayor), Kahlil Seren (Vice Mayor), Mary Dunbar, Melody Joy Hart and Michael Ungar were present; Davida Russell was absent. Also present were Acting City Manager Susanna Niermann O’Neil, Clerk of Council Amy Himmelein, and Law Director William Hanna.

CARES Act funds (Dec. 21)

Council amended an appropriation ordinance to increase the amount previously enacted. This was necessary to spend, by Dec. 31, \$118,000 in CARES Act funds allocated to Cleveland Heights by Cuyahoga County Council. Unexpected retirements also increased the income side of the 2020 budget.

Insurance agreement (Dec. 30)

Council authorized an agreement with Arthur J. Gallagher and Company to continue the city’s protected liability self-insurance program at a cost not to exceed \$675,000. This action was necessary because quotes were higher than allowed in the earlier ordinance.

LWV Observer: Blanche Valancy.

JANUARY 4, 2021

All council members were present, as were the city manager, clerk of council, and law director.

City manager’s report

Niermann O’Neil said 2021 will be a big year for the city, with transition to an elected mayor. Her office will compile a transition book by February, detailing the activity of every department, so all can understand the structure, staff, budget, goals, and commitments of each. She has no information yet about COVID immunizations for city residents, but has offered the CH Community Center as a site.

The end of August will bring the 100th anniversary of Cleveland Heights. COVID permitting, there will be a big celebration, complete with a time capsule.

Chief of police report

Police Chief Annette Mecklenburg detailed progress on recent incidents; details [of the report] are in the Jan. 4 meeting packet, which can be found at www.clevelandheights.com/government.

Since the report was written, it has been determined that one suspect in the Cedar Hill Sunoco carjacking was shot and killed before detectives identified him, and the second suspect has not yet been identified. In the Nov. 28 road-rage shooting on Warrensville Center Road, a suspect in custody in another jurisdiction had a gun that matched evidence in this crime.

Mecklenburg added a report of a bicyclist suffering a fatal head injury when he swerved into a car, which was trying to avoid him, and hit the pavement. The cyclist was not wearing a helmet.

The department’s work with The Diversity



Institute at Cleveland State University has been suspended due to COVID cases, but will resume. Upon query from a council member, Mecklenburg opined that the training is much more effective in person, so virtual sessions will not be scheduled.

City manager

Council approved Jason Stein’s motion to change Niermann O’Neil’s designation from acting city manager to city manager in recognition of her service to the city, with no change in salary

Council member comments

Mary Dunbar said that the death of cyclist Terry Ryan on Lee Road was a tragedy for him and for the driver. The Heights Bicycle Coalition website will publish a set of recommendations for avoiding main streets for travel safety.

Melody Joy Hart noted that former council member Cheryl Stephens has been elected vice president of Cuyahoga County Council. A public forum [Hart is hosting] on Jan. 20, on the mayoral transition, will feature speakers from East Providence, R.I., which underwent a similar transition in 2019.

Davida Russell announced that council is working to get the Racial Justice Task Force running as soon as possible. There were 76 applicants.

Kahlil Seren stated that this will be a big, exciting year for Cleveland Heights. He said that the signing of the Stand Your Ground bill by Gov. DeWine is very bad news for Ohio. He also read a statement about Senate Bill 27, which will require that medical waste from abortion procedures be buried or cremated. He strongly condemned this law, saying it was cruel and will punish women. He added that abortion is health care and health care is a right. He concluded that the General Assembly could instead have spent its time passing school funding reform or Aisha’s Law, rather than this unnecessary legislation.

Michael Ungar said there will be lots going on in planning and development in 2021, but this should not move forward until a new planning director is in place. He stated that the city manager and law director and their teams are moving forward to plan for the transition to an elected mayor. He promised a Public Safety and Health Committee meeting on gun violence soon, including practical suggestions about what residents can do if an incident occurs.

LWV Observer: Blanche Valancy.

Videos of council meetings can be viewed on the “City of Cleveland Heights, OH” YouTube channel.

Expanded reports are available online at www.heightsobserver.org.



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Two-family homes are a boon to owner-occupants

Sydney Chickos

Cleveland Heights has more than 1,200 two-family houses, located in many of its neighborhoods. Also known as doubles, duplexes, and two-flats, this housing type was popular between the 1910s and 1930s, when the city was developing. Having fallen out of fashion in more recent decades, many Cleveland Heights residents are rediscovering the benefits of this unique housing style.

"It has been a great way to transition into homeownership," said Amanda Isaacson, who lives in one unit of a double she owns in North Coventry. "There are good mortgage options for first-time homeowners and owner-occupants. The property pays for our mortgage and makes income. Buying and occupying a multi-family home is a great way to invest and create capital."

A multi-family home is any residential building with separate spaces for two to four families. They often were designed to blend in seamlessly, sharing the eclectic architecture of a neighborhood's single-family homes. Some multi-family homes lend themselves to live-work arrangements, enabling owners to have convenient, but separate, home offices.

While renting out half of a two-family home takes effort, the benefits, according to Helen Hertz, are well worth it. Hertz, a longtime owner-occupant in Cedar Lee, and a realtor with RE/MAX Traditions, explained that any renovations or improvements can be used as a tax benefit. Though maintenance and landscaping can be a full-time job, owner-occupants can outsource these responsibilities to a housing manager or landscape company. "Owning and occupying a multiple-family home is a great investment in the housing market, and Cleveland Heights has many such homes for sale," said Hertz.

Popular Cleveland Heights duplex neighborhoods include areas between Euclid Heights Boulevard and Mayfield Road, Severance and Cedar Lee, Grandview and Bellfield avenues, and the Noble neighborhood.

"When owning and occupying a two-family home, you are able to build a close relationship with your tenants," Isaacson said. "We often see tenants get to know each other and develop community."

Another benefit, said Hertz, is



A two-family home on East Fairfax Road.



A two-family home recently renovated through the FutureHomes program, on Washington Boulevard.

the ability to rent to family members, such as young adult children or elderly parents. "You can remain close while providing support," she said.

FutureHeights, the community development corporation for Cleveland Heights, has recently renovated two doubles through its FutureHomes program, which renovates vacant and abandoned housing through a partnership with the city and county land banks, and trusted renovation partners.

"We thought it was important to provide quality and successful rehabs in our target neighborhoods, enable owner-occupants to accumulate wealth, and create stronger communities," said Abby Lawless, director of real estate development at FutureHeights. "The duplexes provide more flexibility and can be a long-term income stream. We can also allow people to have space to work from home. It allows you to be flexible as the market shifts."

"There are many beautiful doubles available in Cleveland Heights," said Lawless. "I'd encourage anyone interested in investing in the housing market and becoming an owner-occupant to contact a local Cleveland Heights real estate agent."

Learn more about doubles in the city at www.clevelandheights.com/250/two-family-doubles.

Sydney Chickos is a FutureHeights intern and a student at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University.

Community Safety Challenges, Oversight and Reforms



Daniel Flannery



Carole Ballard



David Weiss

Speakers: Daniel Flannery, CWRU Professor and Director, Begun Center for Violence Prevention; Carole Ballard, Director, Education & Training, ADAMHS Board of Cuyahoga County; David Weiss, Mayor of Shaker Heights.

Nine out of 10 calls for police are for nonviolent issues. How can we defuse low-level misdemeanors, keep more people out of jail, and improve racial relations? Can communities shift funding from police departments to social service agencies?

Sunday, Feb. 7, 9:30-10:45 am

Join this free Unitarian Universalist forum via Zoom:
<http://bit.ly/UUCC2021SpringForums>
Meeting ID: 934 5950 5314 Password: 264553

All are welcome Upcoming Unitarian Forums

February 14: Anti-Semitism: Beliefs and Facts

February 21: Living with Covid 19: What's Next Medically?

February 28: Reproductive Freedom: Supreme Court or State's Rights?

For more information on forums, visit
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UHFD urges residents to make fire safety a priority

Mike Cook

The University Heights Fire Department (UHFD) is urging residents to make 2021 a healthier and more fire-safe year.

The U.S. Fire Administration reports 83 percent of all fire deaths in the U.S. happen in homes. These preventable fires result in more than three-quarters of all fire deaths, and thousands of injuries.

The UHFD offers the following fire-safety suggestions:

Make sure that your home is protected by working smoke alarms. Smoke alarms can wake you up if there's a fire. "Half of all home fire deaths happen at night, when people are sleeping," said UH Fire Chief Robert Perko. "Install one on every level of your home, in every bedroom and outside all sleeping areas."

Have a plan. Make sure that everyone in your home knows how to get outside and where to meet if the smoke alarm sounds.

Install alarms on every level. You need a working smoke alarm on every level of your home,



The University Heights Fire Department offers safety tips online, at www.universityheights.com/departments/fire.

including the basement. Interconnected smoke alarms provide the best protection because when one sounds, they all sound.

Test your alarms. Having a smoke alarm with a dead or missing battery is the same as having no smoke alarm at all. Test all of your smoke alarms to make sure that they are working. Replace smoke alarms when they are 10 years old, or if they don't make a sound when

you test them.

Be safe in the kitchen. Cooking is the main cause of home fires and home fire injuries. While you're preparing meals, remember to make safety the first ingredient. Stay in the kitchen when you are cooking at high temperatures; for example, frying, broiling or boiling. Fires start when the heat gets too high. If you see any smoke, or the grease starts to boil, turn the burner off.

Mike Cook is the communications and civic engagement coordinator for University Heights.

UH Police Department offers simple identity-protection tip



The UH Police Department reminds everyone that there is no need—or reason—to carry a social security card.

Mike Cook

Being the victim of identity theft is aggravating, time-consuming, and expensive. The University Heights Police Department (UHPD) offers this simple tip to reduce the

chances of becoming a victim:

If you carry your social security card in your wallet, UHPD urges you to take it out. Leave it at home in a safe place. There is no good reason to keep it with you on a regular basis. In the unfortunate event

that your wallet is lost or stolen, by not carrying your social security card, you can limit the personal information you expose to others.

Mike Cook is the communications and civic engagement coordinator for University Heights.

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Church hosts conversation about stress and addiction



Kelley Pernicone

On Saturday, Feb. 27, at 7 p.m., First Baptist Church of Greater Cleveland (FCB) will host an online community conversation, via Zoom, on stress and addiction in teens and adults.

Recognizing that stress, isolation and uncertainty have become a new normal, due to COVID, FCB's youth program is providing resources to help connect young people, and their families and caregivers, to mental health and addiction resources.

These resources are free to the community and all are welcome to

participate.

The Feb. 27 event, a Rock of Faith Community Conversation, will seek to answer the question "How will I know?" (How will I know that I have a problem? How will I know where to get help? How will I know if a friend is struggling?)

The event will provide a safe environment in which teens and young adults will be able to ask their questions and learn of valuable resources from a panel of experts.

FBC's youth department also plans to host an event for parents and other adult caregivers, later this year, to provide additional mental health and addiction recovery resources.

For registration and additional information, visit www.firstbaptist-cleveland.org/conversation/.

Kelley Pernicone is a member of First Baptist Church and its Rock of Faith Community Conversations Team.

CH residents to pitch visions for CLE



Jess Boeke (left), with her sister, Sarah Pottle.

Michael Bennett

Two Cleveland Heights residents are among those who will present 32 ideas to improve Greater Cleveland at Accelerate: Citizens Make Change, a civic pitch competition, Feb. 22-25.

Presented by the Cleveland Leadership Center in partnership with Citizens Bank, the event will be virtual for the first time since its 2015 debut. It has launched dozens of initiatives that impact everyone from pre-kindergartners to seniors.

The Cleveland Heights presenters are:

Jing Lauengco, Other Brown Girl: Lauengco's initiative is a social-impact storytelling platform that uses conversation, literary and creative arts, technology, and mentoring to create deeper awareness, understanding and appreciation of multiculturalism.

Lauengco, whose family moved to the U.S. from the Philippines when she was an infant, said she felt like a "cultural chameleon" growing up in rural northwestern Ohio. When she visited the Philippines as an adult with her mother, she said, "I had to either defend being American or become more Filipino."

Lauengco wants to use her background as a brand strategist and designer to make multiculturalism and diversity less abstract; not corporate or mandated, but celebrated. "It's about a feeling of belonging," she said.

Jess Boeke, Rust Belt Fibershed: The Cleveland Flax Project, part of Rust Belt Fibershed, encourages people to grow flax to make linen—restoring the environment, building the local economy, and creating a healthier world. "People think of farm-to-table for food, we think of soil-to-skin for garments," she said.

Boeke, a high school English teacher, is pitching with her twin sister, Sarah Pottle. Their efforts using plants to naturally dye textiles led them to the national fibershed community, which seeks to reduce the climate impact of fossil fuels in manufacturing fibers such as polyester. In 2018, they



Jing Lauengco

co-founded the local fibershed, which encompasses parts of Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York.

A trial project in Newbury showed flax could be grown here as it had been until the 1900s. Now, Boeke and Pottle want to expand the network of farmers, processors and consumers. "Using flax is regenerative—for people and the environment," Boeke said.

The preliminary Accelerate rounds will be livestreamed Feb. 22-24. Community leaders will judge and select one finalist from each of six categories. Finalists will pitch their ideas live on Feb. 25, and viewers will select the winner, who will receive \$5,000. Runners-up each will receive \$2,000.

The event is open to the public. Information and pay-what-you-can tickets are available at www.clevelandleads.org/accelerate. For one purchase, a household can access livestreams of the preliminary category competitions, a competition for ideas leveraging technology, and the finals (including voting); and can watch recordings of all pitches.

Cleveland Heights resident Allison Hite was a finalist at Accelerate 2019 for her inspiring storytelling project, Never, Ever, Give Up Cleveland. She recently compiled some of the stories into a book.

Michael Bennett, a Cleveland Heights resident, is vice president of external affairs for the Cleveland Leadership Center.

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Millikin neighbors enhance their park



Student artists Margaret Thompson (left) and Libby Warren stand in front of the new mural at Millikin.

Sydney Chickos

Residents of the neighborhood surrounding the former Millikin Elementary School have come together to enhance the small playground on the site and create a vibrant community space.

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District closed the school in 2006 and is currently using the buildings there to house its maintenance operations.

Starting with just six neighbors in 2018, the Millikin Neighborhood Group began efforts to revitalize the playground, which continued to be used by many young families in the neighborhood. The group organized a cleanup of the playground area.

Under the leadership of Cindie Carroll-Pankhurst, Deby Auerbach-Brown, Robin Koslen and others, the group began to raise money for additions and renovations, including new landscaping and playground equipment. The group has built slides and installed a storage bench, a balance beam, and a tetherball court. Neighbors planted flowers and provided chalk, bubbles, and other toys to neighborhood children who frequent the park. "The tetherball has been a surprisingly big hit with the children," Pankhurst said.

Last November, the group installed a two-part mural on the façade of the former school building. Local teenagers submitted works of art through their schools. Six pieces were selected to be part of the mural. More than 78 neighbors gathered to celebrate the mural's unveiling on Nov. 8. Several of the teen artists, along with their families and teachers, attended.

Pre-pandemic, the group hosted several events, including a chalk festival and a music consort comprising students and alumni of Cleveland Heights High School. While the pandemic has made gathering more difficult, neighbors continue their efforts to raise money for the playground, tend to the landscaping, and improve this valued community space.

In July 2020, residents learned that the city of Cleveland Heights had made a preliminary offer to the school district to market the Millikin property for redevelopment. Pankhurst said she would like to



Children play on the enhanced playground.



The Millikin playground.

continue to see the space used as a neighborhood playground. "This has been a positive factor in embracing our diversity," she said.

To learn more about the group and how to get involved, visit "The Millikin Neighborhood Page" on Facebook.

Sydney Chickos is an intern at Future-Heights and a student at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University.

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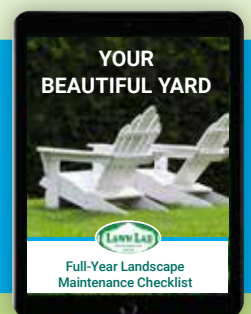
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Church members provide diapers to those in need



Church of the Saviour member Lisa Wadsworth takes diaper inventory in the storage room at Father Michael Wittman Ozanam Center.

Carol Iott

When families struggle financially and seek assistance obtaining essential items, community resources are generally available for free food and clothing. Diapers, however, are in constant demand, but often not offered through local pantries because they are expensive and “non-essential” in limited food budgets. Families with babies and toddlers are left with the significant challenge of obtaining this basic item.

Thanks to donations from the Metropolitan Ministry fund at Cleveland Heights’ Church of the Saviour UMC, the congregation has been meeting the demand for diapers for the past several years, distributing them at the Father Michael Wittman Ozanam Center, an East Cleveland food pantry and clothing bank serving Cleveland’s East Side.

Congregation members Tom and Lisa Wadsworth manage the diaper inventory on behalf of Church of the Saviour. Thanks to financial and diaper donations, the church supplies an average of 10,000 diapers per year, for weekly distribution.

“Church of the Saviour’s connection to the overall work of the Father Michael Wittman Ozanam Center seems relatively small in the grand scheme of things, considering how many people are served,” said the Rev. Andy Call, the church’s lead pastor. “But it isn’t small to the families who need

diapers for their children.

“The most impactful ministries often don’t come at the institutional level, but in the work of individuals who strive to live the way Christ did. That’s what this ministry is all about and what makes it so special.”

The Wadsworths support the effort by purchasing and delivering the diapers, along with fellow church members who regularly volunteer.

“It is a privilege for Church of the Saviour to partner with the Father Michael Wittman Ozanam Center,” said Tom. “We are inspired by the many volunteers from the 14 churches that support this important ministry for East Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, and the surrounding communities.”

The Father Michael Wittman Ozanam Center operates every Saturday, 10 a.m. to noon, as one of eight hunger centers with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Cleveland. The center is located at 13824 Euclid Ave., at St. Philomena Church in East Cleveland. A registered agency with the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, the all-volunteer organization provides individuals and families with free food and clothing.

For more information, visit www.facebook.com/groups/fmwoc.

A 15-year Cleveland Heights resident, Carol Iott is an arts consultant, a board member for the Father Michael Wittman Ozanam Center, and a member of Communion of Saints Parish.

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Heights cyclist Ryan dies in Lee Road accident



COURTESY JOY HENDERSON

Longtime Cleveland Heights resident and cyclist Terry Ryan, 71, collided with a motorist on Lee Road, near the Heights library, on the morning of Dec. 28. He died on Dec. 31. Ryan had been riding his bike from a convenience store to his home on Queenston Road.

Ryan was a retired house painter and handyman, an avid reader and a puzzle aficionado. He grew up in the family home on Lee Road and graduated from Heights High. He was preceded in death by his brother Dan and his mother, Anne. His four surviving siblings are Pat, Jim, Tom (also of Cleveland Heights) and Mary.

Nighttown sold: more changes afoot for Cedar Fairmount



DEANNA BREMER FISHER

The Top of the Hill project rises around Nighttown, while the former Fifth Third Bank building is being converted to a Chipotle with drive thru.

Deanna Bremer Fisher

With the \$80 million Ascent at the Top of the Hill project rising in the Cedar Fairmount Business District, the announcement that Brendan Ring has sold Nighttown signals that more change is on the way.

On Jan. 5, a syndicate of real estate investors, headed by Rico Pietra and Yaron Kandelker, purchased all of Ring's holdings in Cedar Fairmount: the building that houses CL Barber Salon, the former Zoss building, the former Fifth Third Bank, and the iconic Nighttown restaurant, which Ring has owned since 2001. A regional destination and community gathering place, generations of Heights residents have celebrated significant life events at the restaurant, and cherished the cozy Irish pub's eclectic atmosphere. Ring expanded the restaurant over the years to include 435 seats in

several rooms, two three-season patios, and musical offerings that led *DownBeat Magazine* to name it "one of the top 100 jazz clubs in the world."

Ring closed Nighttown in March 2020, out of concern for the safety of his patrons and employees, before the state mandated shutdown. He reopened on July 1, and then closed again on Nov. 22, when COVID cases began to rise. He said he had not planned to sell, but that the unsolicited offer and some health scares made him realize that the time was right.

"We are so happy for Brendan, and so sad for the rest of us," said Myra Orenstein, executive director of the Cedar Fairmount Special Improvement District (CFSID).

Ring helped create the Cedar Fairmount Business Association in 2004, which later became CFSID. The state of Ohio enables the creation of nonprofit Special Improvement



RICHARD STEWART

Brendan Ring

Districts (SIDs) to enable property owners in a geographic area to pay an additional tax that is designated for specific improvements, such as marketing, special events and beautification efforts. Ring served as CFSID's founding president and then its treasurer until last month. Board meetings were often held at Nighttown.

"I hope the new owners will continue with the SID. It is the reason why Cedar Fairmount is so successful," said Ring. "When we first started, the area had no cohesiveness. It was a bit worn down. We weren't getting anything done."

CFSID began holding an annual street festival. In 2009, CFSID created a streetscape improvement plan; it implemented the \$4-million streetscape and Cedar Road resurfacing project in 2018. Ring

continued on page 19

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Communion of Saints School celebrates students' achievements

Gerry Whiteley

The eighth-graders at Communion of Saints School have been busy completing high school applications and entrance exams. Based on those exam results, some students received scholarship offers, in various amounts, from the high schools for which they took entrance exams:

- **Brady Foss:** Benedictine High School Scholarship — Merit Scholar
- **Victor Gideon:** St. Ignatius High School Scholarship — Ignatian Scholar; Notre Dame-Cathedral Latin Scholarship — Prestigious Merit Scholarship
- **Charlie Hubbard:** St. Ignatius High School Scholarship — Ignatian Scholar
- **Gabe Ewen:** St. Ignatius High School Scholarship — Ignatian Scholar

- **Emmanuel Lewis-Davis:** Villa Angela-St. Joseph — VASJ Scholarship
- **Bridget Mathias:** Beaumont High School — Beaumont Presidential Academic Scholarship
- **Zoe Onwuzulike:** Beaumont High School — Beaumont Presidential Scholarship
- **Della Daher:** Beaumont High School — Beaumont Presidential Scholarship

Eva Panza scored in the 95th percentile for the Reading ISEE exam. (The Independent School Entrance Exam is a rigorous exam used for admission to private high schools.)

Communion of Saints School congratulates these eighth-grade students on their achievements.

Gerry Whiteley is principal of Communion of Saints School.

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3. Sexton Blake versus the Master Crooks

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Cleveland Heights-University Heights Board of Education

Meeting highlights



DECEMBER 8, 2020

Board President Jodi Sourini and members Dan Heintz, James Posch and Beverly Wright were present. Malia Lewis was unable to attend due to a medical issue. Also present were Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby and Treasurer Scott Gainer.

Public comments

University Heights Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan stated he testified before the Ohio House Finance Committee in support of House Bill 305 (the Fair School Funding Bill).

Cleveland Heights Teachers Union President Karen Rego thanked the board for working to negotiate the two-year contract.

Krissy Dietrich Gallagher of Tiger Nation to Fund Schools thanked the board for finding common ground with the union to reach an agreement. She said that many parents felt torn between the two sides.

Union contract

Superintendent Kirby and Treasurer Gainer presented key points in the negotiated contract between the board and teachers union. These include an increase in insurance premiums based on salary step, an increase in medical deductibles and co-pays, a reduction in force based on seniority, the addition to the calendar of more teacher-driven planning time, and potential pro-rating of supplemental contracts. Gainer presented the changes in the insurance plan, wages, pay, and State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) pickup, and the savings these items provide to the district. The contract will run through June 30, 2022, and 94 percent of the teachers approved it.

Dan Heintz observed that the contract does not keep up with the cost of living. He also pointed out that teachers are working harder during the pandemic.

The board unanimously approved the contract.

Update on pandemic operations

Remote learning update: A multiple disabilities/autism advisory group was formed in November to advise on school reopening. All students were moved to remote learning on Nov. 19. Seniors will attend end-of-course testing in-person at the high school; this testing is a graduation requirement. The PSAT is scheduled for Jan. 26 at the high school. Plans for PSAT and SAT preparation opportunities will be available in 2021.

Building air quality: The engineering firm HEAPY assessed school building heating and cooling systems. They determined that the air quality aligns with CDC regulations and that the buildings are COVID ready. A report will be posted on the district's website.

Board comments concerning COVID vaccination: The board requested that Superintendent Kirby investigate how to facilitate early vaccinations for teachers.

LWV Observer: Rosemarie Fairman.

DECEMBER 15, 2020

Malia Lewis was absent, as she was recovering from surgery. All other board members were present.

Library board of trustees interviews

There were 12 applicants for one open library board position [with a seven-year term]: Lee Barbee, Charie Babcock, Nora Corcoran, Bill Frank, Jerry Hannibal, Justin Hite, Tony Liotta, Tyler McTigue, Paul Miller, Vai Pathak, Samantha Ryder, and André Witt.

After interviewing each person individually, the board voted unanimously in favor of Tyler McTigue. Board members commented that McTigue has lived in the Heights for nine years and brings much pertinent volunteer and business experience. Importantly, he is knowledgeable about the library's operations and challenges, and understands the role of library board trustee.

LWV Observer: Robin Koslen.

JANUARY 5, 2021

All board members were present, as were the superintendent and treasurer.

Organizational meeting

The board elected Jim Posch as board president, Malia Lewis as vice president, and Beverly Wright as treasurer pro tem.

Superintendent's report

The superintendent reviewed the county's current COVID metrics and noted that the risk level is currently higher than it was at the time of the county's November stay-at-home advisory. Planning for reopening continues, and more information and recommendations regarding reopening will be provided at the board's Jan. 12 work session. The superintendent's recommendations will continue to follow the guidance of the county Board of Health.

Five-Year Forecast

Treasurer Gainer reviewed the changes in the forecasted revenues and expenses compared with the previous forecast. The current forecast shows a positive 2022 year-end balance of \$3.6 million, and a negative 2023 year-end balance of \$2.2 million. The updated forecast reflects the recently renegotiated agreements for all employees, as well as an unexpected second workers compensation refund from the state. The forecast still reflects \$2 million in expense cuts that have yet to be identified.

The board approved the January 2021 five-year forecast, which may be viewed at <https://go.boarddocs.com/oh/chuh/board.nsf/public>.

Board comments

Jim Posch proposed reviewing board priorities at the February regular meeting. He requested that administrative staff provide comparative data from area school districts as recommendations regarding cuts are developed and shared with the community. The board also discussed reviewing the recommendations for expense reductions in recent performance audits of area school districts, and considering requesting such an audit.

LWV Observers: Kathy Petrey and Robin Koslen.

All meetings are held virtually, streamed on the district's YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/CHUHSchools), and recorded for later viewing.

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Library welcomes board member; honors outgoing president

Sheryl Banks

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System is pleased to announce the appointment of its newest board member, Tyler McTigue. His term began in January 2021.

McTigue, the director of enterprise solutions sales for Acuity Brands, has lived in Cleveland Heights for nine years, and will serve a seven-year term on the library board. He replaces James K. Roosa, outgoing board president, whose 10 years of service ended in December 2020.

“To say I am humbled to serve the Cleveland Heights-University Heights library system as a library trustee is an understatement,” said McTigue. “I am incredibly proud of the Heights and hope to help Heights Libraries continue to open doors for the people of our great city to diverse opportunities and ideas.”

“COVID-19 has forever changed how our world operates,” added McTigue, “and I’d like to support the library’s efforts to bring [its] services to people wherever they are.”

Outgoing president Roosa was appointed in 2010 to finish out three remaining years of the term



New Heights Libraries Board Member Tyler McTigue.

of a trustee who resigned from the board. Roosa was then appointed for a new seven-year term. His 2010–20 tenure encompassed Heights Libraries’ acquisition of the Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus, the creation of the Heights Knowledge and Innovation Center (HKIC), passage of the 2014 levy, and the renovation of the University Heights branch.

“Jim is a business attorney with Roosa Co. LPA and adjunct professor at Cleveland Marshall College of Law, so his legal experience and knowledge were incredibly helpful during his term,” said Heights



Heights Libraries Director Nancy Levin presents outgoing board president Jim Roosa with a resolution honoring his 10 years of service.

Libraries Director Nancy Levin. “We will miss his expertise and passion for the library.”

“I will miss the opportunity to collaborate on a regular basis with all of the board members with whom I’ve had the privilege of working over the last 10 years,” said Roosa, who has lived in Cleveland Heights for 20 years. “They are all incredibly

committed to the library.” Dana Fluellen, who previously served as the library board’s vice president and operations committee chair, succeeds Roosa as board president.

Sheryl Banks is the communications manager for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System.

Cleveland Heights – University Heights Public Library Board Meeting highlights

DECEMBER 7, 2020

Board members present were President James Roosa, Vice President Dana Fluellen, Patti Carlyle, Gabe Crenshaw, Max Gerboc, Annette Iwamoto, and Vikas Turakhia.

Recognition of board member
The board approved a resolution of tribute for James Roosa for his completion of 10 years of board service and leadership.

2020 amended permanent appropriation
The board approved an appropriation of \$11,634,531.93 for expenses during the current fiscal year, ending Dec. 31, 2020.

Furniture purchase
The board approved a purchase order to Buy-Rite/SOS Office Supplies, in the amount of \$11,804, for staff furniture for the Heights Knowledge and Innovation Center (HKIC).

Property, liability and cyber insurance
The board approved the annual premium of \$48,009 for the library’s comprehensive, property, casualty and liability insurance with The Ohio Plan, and \$3,901 for cyber insurance with Traveler’s Insurance, for the period Dec. 1, 2020, through Nov. 30, 2021.

Personnel policies
Several policies had to be modified or created to apply to pandemic situations. The board adopted the following policies:

- HR Policy 3.6 Exposure to Contagious Disease
- HR Policy 5.0 Temporary Sick Leave Policies
- HR Policy 5.12 Critical Leave & Pay

Vision and life insurance
The board approved a contract with VSP Insurance for library-provided vision insurance, for coverage effective Jan. 1, 2021, through Dec. 31, 2022. There was no increase in vision insurance coverage from the previous year.

The board approved library-provided group life and accidental death and dismemberment insurance for each eligible employee, for coverage effective Jan. 1, 2021, through Dec. 31, 2021; and for Voluntary Life Insurance, fully paid by the employee, at the rates published in the Lincoln Renewal Summary.

Five-star library
The library director reported that Heights Libraries was designated a five-star library (the highest ranking) by *Library Journal* [based on statistics for the year 2018].

Curbside service resumes
Due the recent surge in COVID cases, library services have reverted to curbside delivery, phone reference and virtual programming.

LWV Observer: Elizabeth M. Tracy.

Library board meetings are recorded and available on YouTube on the Cleveland Heights University Heights Public Library Channel.

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Look for the Heights Observer at Tommy's



Tommy Fello, owner of Tommy's restaurant (1824 Coventry Road), has been taking care of customers for nearly 50 years. He encourages readers to support independent local businesses now, more than ever. Tommy's menu offers something for everyone—especially those who love milkshakes. Currently, Tommy's is open for both dine-in and take-out orders. (Visit www.orderstart.com/tommys to place your take-out order.) While you're there, be sure to pick up a copy of the Heights Observer.

Pick up the Heights Observer at Heights Hardware — a CH business since 1911



Heights Hardware has been a fixture on Coventry Road since 1911. Andy Gathy, the owner, describes the store as an "old fashioned" nut-and-bolts hardware store with everything one might need to complete any project. Gathy and employees Jef Lowell and Kaila Isom are happy to assist. Heights Hardware stocks COVID-protection supplies including KN95 masks, Purell hand sanitizer, and Lysol wipes, as well as snow shovels and ice melt—and copies of the Heights Observer. Heights Hardware (www.heightshardware.com) is located at 1792 Coventry Road.

Thank you!
The Wine Spot team appreciates the generosity and support of our neighbors while we all work together to stay safe and healthy. Your kindness and patience is recognized and valued. We hope to see you on the patio this spring!

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NIGHTTOWN continued from page 15

and CFSID were tireless advocates for development at the Top of the Hill site.

"The SID unified the district, bringing the merchants, owners and neighbors together," said Ring. "The streetscape came together and is beautiful. Without the support of the SID, Top of the Hill wouldn't have happened."

Ring said the new owners are investing in the building's façade, and will upgrade the 16 apartments above. They plan to reopen Nighttown this summer, and are negotiating with "an elite local celebrity chef."

A new drive-thru Chipotle concept, where customers order with an app for fast pickup, is slated to open in the former Fifth Third Bank building in March.

"It's an exciting time to be in Cedar Fairmount," said Ring, adding that he hopes that the new owners will build on the legacy of Nighttown, add the new chef's talent, and take it to the next level—and that they will be actively involved in the SID.

Ring's future plans are uncertain. He and his wife will do some traveling, but he says he has no intention of abandoning Nighttown. "I'm looking forward to being on the other side of the bar," he said.

Deanna Bremer Fisher is executive director of FutureHeights and publisher of the Heights Observer.

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You may be forgetting something



SONGS AND
STORIES

David Budin

There is something that I think a lot of us are not thinking about this February. We are thinking about the pandemic, the economy, the change in U.S. presidents and administrations, the possibility of insurrection, if and when we can get vaccinated, and other issues that may be weighing heavily on us. Here in Cleveland Heights, we're also thinking—because it's normally the worst part of winter—about the ever-present potential for unlivable temperatures and massive snowfalls. And, for those with kids, if and when public schools are going to open for in-person learning, and whether that will be totally safe when they do.

What many of us are not thinking about is Valentine's Day. And, I mean, what's more February than Valentine's Day? Other than Lincoln's birthday. And my anniversary. Three good opportunities to eat candy. Why candy? Well, Valentine's Day is self-explanatory. The other two . . . because it's February and, around here, it's dark and cold, and that calls for candy. In my opinion.

Why did we get married in February, in Cleveland? Because in December we decided to get mar-

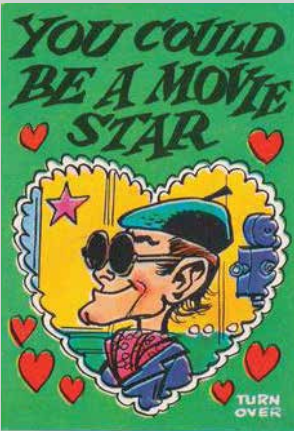
ried in January, when we'd be on a trip to Los Angeles. It was going to be 40 years since my parents got married in January in Los Angeles, so we thought that would be a good time. Until we figured out that my parents would be in Cleveland when we got married in Los Angeles, and they'd be annoyed that we didn't have the wedding here. So, we planned a small wedding ceremony for soon after we got back, not thinking that a huge snowstorm could prevent our siblings from coming to Cleveland, which it did.

The storm hit Cleveland the day before and then moved right along and away from Cleveland. But it moved east and closed the airports our siblings were flying from. So, the wedding ceremony was even smaller than anticipated. But we had a party afterward, with a big Corbo's cassata cake, for an expanded gathering of family and friends. It might have made more sense to do it in June. I mean, it was cold outside. But not inside.

Our anniversary is two days from Valentine's Day. So, candy. And cards. That is: card (one of us doesn't like greeting cards . . . even though I used to get paid for writing them). This year, I'm going to make two Valentine's Day cards. For my grandchildren. They're not in school. Last year, they were in preschool and this year the older one is in kindergarten at Fairfax, but not at Fairfax; she goes to school in a computer. Which she likes, by the way; and she's learning. But no in-class Valentine exchange (if they still do that).

When I was in elementary school, at Coventry, our teachers had us make large, heavy-paper envelopes which we decorated and taped to the fronts of our desks. Then we walked around placing Valentine cards in each of them. I remember spending a lot of time deciding which card should go to which kid. And I loved the year that Topps produced cards called Funny Valentines, with sayings like: "Your teeth are like stars. . . . They come out at night. And: "Your skin looks like a million dollars. . . . Green and wrinkled."

I'm not sure why this has stayed with me, but I remember that on Valentine's Day when I was in second grade, when I was walking home from school with my large envelope of cards under my arm, a couple of kids who were goofing around accidentally bumped into me and knocked the envelope out of my hand and into the slushy gutter, as we waited for the light to change at the corner of Coventry and Mayfield, and that the Cleveland Heights policeman who was acting as the crossing guard there bent over and picked it up for me. It's a warm memory, and one that I thought about often when police officers on Coventry were roughing me up, 10 years later, when



In 1960, this was really funny.



COURTESY DAVID BUDIN

I was a hippie hanging out on the street. But, still . . . it's a nice memory. The first part.

When I was about 30 and working in the promotion department of a rock radio station, M105, downtown, on Valentine's Day, I took a large mailing envelope and wrote "Place Valentines here" on it and taped it to the front of my desk. I actually received a few.

This year I'm going to make fancy Valentine cards to give to my grandchildren. With candy, of course.

It's February, and it's dark and cold. But it's 2021. There's a new president and administration. There's a vaccine. The hours of daylight are getting longer every day. So, don't forget about Valentine's Day this year. Or candy.

David Budin is a freelance writer for national and local publications, the former editor of Cleveland Magazine and Northern Ohio Live, an author, and a professional musician and comedian. His writing focuses on the arts and, especially, pop-music history.

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Bonus Questions:

What do you miss most about shopping/dining in the Heights since the onset of Covid-19? Share with us your favorite past experiences and what you are looking forward to doing again once the pandemic is over and business/safety restrictions are lifted.

What new business would you like to see in the Heights? Why? (Let us know if you have a specific neighborhood or building in mind.)

Vote for your favorite Heights businesses!

Write in the names of your favorite Heights businesses or visit www.futureheights.org to complete the online ballot.

Deadline for ballot submission:
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All valid ballots will receive a chance to win a prize package of gift certificates to Heights businesses (\$250 min. value)

- One ballot per person; must supply complete contact information below
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