FutureHeights’ 2021 annual meeting is June 9

Sydney Chickos

On June 9, FutureHeights will present its 2021 annual meeting on the outdoor patio of Boss Dog Brewing Company, 2179 Lee Road. The program will also be livestreamed for remote viewing.

FutureHeights, a nonprofit community development corporation, strives to engage Heights residents to ensure a vibrant and sustainable future for Cleveland Heights and University Heights. This year’s meeting will focus on the unique neighborhoods in the Heights, and Cleveland Heights’ 100-year history. FutureHeights will also report on its activities and accomplishments, as well as its vision for the future.

The event, which begins at 7 p.m., is free and open to the public, but reservations are required. For more information and to RSVP, visit www.futureheights.org/2021annual/meeting, or call 216-320-1423.

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

Molly Zimmerman and Fred Gearhart, in their Cleveland Heights sculpture garden.

Heights Music Hop will return in 2021, calls for musicians

Deanna Bremer Fisher

After taking a bi-annual hiatus in 2020 due to the pandemic, the eighth annual Heights Music Hop festival will take place on Saturday, Sept. 18, in the Cedar Lee Business District. Heights Music Hop showcases local, live musical talent to promote the Heights as home to the arts, while also helping to support the local economy and celebrate the community’s diversity, walkability and great quality of life.

In the past, performances have occurred within local businesses; this year, Heights Music Hop will present the event on outdoor stages throughout the district, to ensure the safety of participants.

The 2021 festival will showcase new musical talent from a variety of genres, including jazz, rock, R&B, classical, rap, indie, Americana and folk.

On May 15, FutureHeights will issue a “call for musicians” via the Heights Music Hop website at www.heightsmusichop.com. Interested musicians can download an application to return by the July 1 deadline.

FutureHeights, a nonprofit community development corporation, presents the event to inspire community collaboration and promote a vibrant and sustainable future for the Heights.
Merchants support mixed-use development at Cedar-Lee-Meadowbrook

Nine Cedar Lee business owners

The below-signed merchants in the Cedar Lee Business District strongly support a mixed-use development at the Cedar-Lee-Meadowbrook (CLM) site (the vacant land on the east side of Lee Road at Meadowbrook Boulevard, and on the municipal parking lot between Tullamore and Lee roads) for the CLM project. We are excited about the catalytic possibilities of the CLM project, just as the Top of the Hill project is bringing to Cedar Fair Park.

The COVID-19 pandemic has gravely impacted small businesses like ours. A new mixed-use development at CLM would fill a gap in the district, create excitement, and attract more residents and customers to support our district and our city.

Buckingham condo residents endorse Hart for mayor

To the Editor:

We’re sending this letter to announce our endorsement of Melody Hart for mayor of Cleveland Heights. In the information regarding her announcement to run, she emphasizes characteristics such as “responsive,” taking into account “citizens’ complaints,” and “transparency.” From our perspective, as residents of the Buckingham Condominium—the lone, four-story, circa 1925 building in the very center of the Top of the Hill (TOH) project—Melody Hart is the one member of council who has consistently reached out to us in our many concerns.

Last May, just as ground was breaking for TOH, Melody and Davida Russell, another CH council member, went out of their way to listen to our concerns. They could see our need for new tree growth after so much has been razed for development; they understood our concerns about parking (both temporarily during construction, and permanently in the new garage); and they grasped residents’ distaste for a gated, locked, Astroturfed Buckingham parking lot, permanently in the new garage (as residents of the Buckingham Condominium, we would have access for those seeking office.

Cleveland Heights residents Donald King, Joanne Poderis, Carolina Covington, and Regina Staple.
Residents ask candidates to embrace environmental policy platform

Peggy Spaeth

We are Cleveland Heights and University Heights residents with a vision for a healthy environment within our own political boundaries and beyond. We are requesting that mayoral, council, and school board candidates incorporate environmental policies in their platforms. We are looking for elected leaders who are knowledgeable about, embrace, and apply an environmental overlay to all policy proposals and actions. Each decision affecting the people and lands of our cities should have a documented and transparent review of how this overlay is applied. The overlay should include the implementation of policy change. The responsibility of elected officials is to implement policy that are unfulfilled. One goal, “Environmentally Sustainable Community,” (pages 149–59), is populated with local actions that should take priority as we face global climate change. The responsibility of elected leaders is to implement policy.

Local actions are vitally important to the global climate emergency. “Think Globally, Act Locally” is not just a slogan. The participation of citizens in this process is essential. Our request for an Environmental Policy Platform is not to lay all responsibility for a healthy environment exclusively on elected officials and staff. Rather, we are asking for local leadership for local initiatives to engage and encourage residents and businesses to effect positive change in partnership with a coordinated plan among city departments.

[In addition to Peggy Spaeth, this request is signed by Alex Sitarak, Barbara Day, Barbara French, Brenda Bagby, Cari Hickerson, Carl Anthony, Catalina Wagers, Cathy Whelan, Cheryl Hanger, Gindie Carroll-Pankhurst, Christopher Shiel, Colleen Szechyks, Deborah Van Kleef, Donald Vicarel, Elena Baldwin, Emma Shook, Eran Shiloh, Greg Van Niel, Isabel Trautwein, James Warling, Jeffrey Johansen, Jeremy Baldwin, Jim Lissemore, Jim Miller, John Barber, John Barrett, Kathy Petrey, Ken Petrey, Laura Marks, Mary Zeneisk, Michael Morse, Natalie Elwell, Robin Koslen, Roger French, Sasha Barrett, Stephen Sedam, and Tom Hanger.]

Peggy Spaeth volunteers with others to improve habitat in our public and private green spaces.

Snodgrass announces CH council candidacy

Al Snodgrass

I am excited to share with you that I am running for Cleveland Heights City Council. I hope to earn your vote this November.

I am honored to have earned the early support of Ohio State Sen. Sandra Williams; Ohio Senate Assistant Minority Leader Nickie J. Antonio; Ohio State Rep. Janine Boyd, Ohio State Rep. Terrence Upchurch, Cuyahoga County Council Vice President Cheryl Stephens; business owners Quintin Jones (Budy’s Pub) and Tommy Fello (Tommy’s); community leaders Earl Pike, Sue Dean, Marquez Brown, Rhonda Davis-Lovejoy, Jennifer Holland, and George Sample; I am also honored to receive the endorsement of surrounding local elected officials, including Mayor Annette Blackwell (Maple Heights), Mayor Geovinne Welo (South Euclid), Shaker Heights Council Member Carmella Williams, and Bratenahl Council President Pro Tem Keith Benjamin.

I am running to serve you on city council and be a voice for progress that we can see. We have some of the best people to call neighbors, some of the best places to grab a really good drink and dinner, and some of the most beautiful houses and buildings in the region. I want to ensure we retain the Cleveland Heights welcoming feel, while growing and maintaining our resident and business base.

There is a lot at stake this November. We will elect our first [elect]ed mayor, and four of the seven city council seats are up for election. We have an opportunity to elect progressive, energetic and passionate city council members who will move Cleveland Heights forward. That’s why I am running! I realized we can’t wait another four years to see more progress in our community. The future of Cleveland Heights is on the line this November.

To discuss issues important to you that you want tackled by your city council, to learn more about me, or to join my campaign, please contact my campaign by phone (216-346-1558) or e-mail (al@alsnodgrass.com), or visit www.alsnodgrass.com.

Al Snodgrass (AD) K. Snodgrass is a candidate for Cleveland Heights City Council.

Residents ask candidates to embrace environmental policy platform

We are Cleveland Heights and University Heights residents with a vision for a healthy environment within our own political boundaries and beyond. We are requesting that mayoral, council, and school board candidates incorporate environmental policies in their platforms. We are looking for elected leaders who are knowledgeable about, embrace, and apply an environmental overlay to all policy proposals and actions. Each decision affecting the people and lands of our cities should have a documented and transparent review of how this overlay is applied. The overlay should include the implementation of policy change. The responsibility of elected officials is to implement policy that are unfulfilled. One goal, “Environmentally Sustainable Community,” (pages 149–59), is populated with local actions that should take priority as we face global climate change. The responsibility of elected leaders is to implement policy.

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Peggy Spaeth volunteers with others to improve habitat in our public and private green spaces.
What Cleveland Heights needs in its elected mayor

Michael Morse

A leader does not wait to be appointed or elected. What have you [the candidate] already been leading? Where will you lead us? We need to move forward into the 21st century, toward a brighter future for Cleveland Heights. Think of an unlimited future, attracting and retaining people, meeting crises, overcoming challenges. Too often I hear people talk in terms of the limits of current problems, shrinking population, and the restrictive framework of our current state and local governments. I never again want to hear someone say, “It is what it is.” How will you lead us beyond these issues?

We are diverse even within our neighborhoods. Get to know someone else. No simplistic solutions. I never again want to hear someone say, “It is what it is.” How will you lead us beyond these issues?

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Economic crisis: The economy is changing in ways that are hard to predict and accommodate. Finding a better way to get reinvestment in our vacant and distressed properties would go a long way. If we destroy our urban forest while ignoring distressed areas right across the street, how would that succeed?

Find better methods. Don’t raise taxes on current residents so you can give tax abatement to new residents; this drives people away more than it brings people in.

The purpose of electing a mayor is to have a full-time leader. There are no quick fixes. No easy solutions. No simplistic solutions. How will you lead us forward?

Michael Morse is a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights.

Housing inspection and code enforcement are critical

Thomas Bier

The 2020 survey of Cleveland Heights residents found that, of all the services provided by City Hall, respondents were least satisfied with “enforcement of city codes and ordinances.” Safety services topped the ranking. I wasn’t surveyed, but I agree.

Many, many properties do not look good. That’s the number one issue for candidates.

It seems that past officials, over decades, never really appreciated just how critical inspection and enforcement are once structures lose their newness.

Cleveland Heights is the third-oldest suburb in the county (behind East Cleveland and Lakewood). Half of our homes are 100 years old. Because officials failed to address adequately what was becoming old housing, shoddiness became an acceptable standard.

The worse the condition of housing, the more negatives occur. Most of the issues that disturb the community (violent incidents, gunfire, speeders, disruptions on streets and in schools, high taxes) stem from the failure to control the condition of homes and apartments. As shoddiness became acceptable and the number of poorly maintained properties increased, so, too, did the odds that such conditions would attract owners and renters (and their guests) who would be troublesome—and, in some instances, downright dangerous.

Long-term change in property value is a telling measure of a community’s situation. Between 1960 and 2018, the inflation-adjusted value of residential property in Cleveland Heights declined 34%. (East Cleveland declined 87%, Lakewood increased 20%.) That enormous loss in value—a billion dollars of tax base, gone!—forced the high property tax rate that now bedevils the city.

Most property owners are responsible and do what is needed. Some are responsible but lack the means to do what’s needed. Others are both irresponsible and means-lacking.

Poorly maintained properties owned by people who lack the income to do what is needed is the city’s most
Re)writing history

Deborah Van Kleeft and Carla Rautenberg

Like all Cleveland Heights resi-
dents, in late March we received our
copies of Focus, the city mag-
zine. The inside cover features an
attractive layout of historical
photographs, and announces the
100th anniversary of Cleveland
Heights’ incorporation as a city.
To our surprise, the text includes:

“From our early days, diversity
and creativity have been cherished
traits. People of all races, religions
and economic backgrounds have
always been welcome.”

Why are we surprised? Well, for
two, we recently read Re-
sisting Segregation: Cleveland Heights
Activists Shape their Community,
1964–1976, by Susan Kaeser. As
Songs and Stories columnist David
Budin noted in his April column, the
book chronicles the ardu-
ous transformation of Cleveland
Heights from a white enclave to
a racially integrated city.

During the city’s early decades,
Cleveland Heights census data
showed only a handful of Black
residents, mostly live-in servants
and apartment building custodians.
In fact, discrimination, enforced by
real estate brokers and mortgage
lenders, kept all of Cleveland’s
suburbs white.

It took determination, vision, and
skilled organizing to make
Cleveland Heights a community
that would, in 2020, adopt the
slogan, “All Are Welcome.” Along
the way there were lawsuits, white
flight and many, many meetings.
Indeed, our current city manager,
Susanna Niermann O’Neil, was a
fair-housing activist before going
to work at City Hall.

Along with Budin and count-
less others, we remember when Af-
can American homebuyers faced
welcomes that were anything but
warm. From bombing newcomers’
homes to strewing trash on their
lawns, from police harassment to
hostility in local shops, the mes-
sage was, “We don’t want you here.”

Still, determined Black pio-
near persisted, through a combi-
nation of courage, solidarity with
other new arrivals, and the support
of those white residents dedicated
to making Cleveland Heights a
racially integrated city.

Anniversaries should be occa-
sions to reflect on how far we’ve
come and how far we have to go.
Rather than rewrite our history,
we should face it and learn from
it, recommitting ourselves to the
ideals that motivated those brave
and savvy activists of 50 years ago.

Much work remains. We hope
the city’s newly appointed Racial
Justice Task Force will offer in-
sights and recommendations to
keep all of us on the journey.

Resisting Segregation, by Susan
Kaeser (Cleveland Landmarks
Press, 2020), is available at Mac’s
Backs. [Prior to the book’s pub-
lication, Kaeser generously shared
her research, which was essential
to us in writing our series, “Before
‘diversity’—the integration of
Cleveland Heights,” published in
January, February and March 2019.]

When we submitted our April
column, Cleveland Heights city
council had approved Metro-
Health’s plan for a new behavioral
health unit. Before voting, council
heard comments from nearly 120
residents who supported the ex-
pansion, but opposed the removal
of a 0.79-acre section of Millikin
Woods for added parking spaces.
Cutting down trees seemed espe-
cially egregious given the 70 acres
of underutilized asphalt parking
lots just across Severance Circle.

Although there was nothing in the
legislation to stop the hospital from
moving ahead, there were hints that
it might not be a done deal.

Sure enough, according to
City Manager O’Neil, city staff
was able to negotiate further
response to residents’ concerns.
MetroHealth ultimately agreed to
fewer parking spaces, which
required only 0.45 acres of trees
to be cut, a victory for woodland
preservationists.

While council members Melo-
dy Hart and Kahill Seren interced-
ed on behalf of the woods, much
credit goes to residents of the Mil-
likin neighborhood. Assisted by
sustainability expert Linda Sekura
of the Northeast Ohio Sierra Club,
they sounded the alarm and ably
spurred a headed campaign. Perhaps
what’s needed now is an ongoing
group to steward and defend the
remaining Millikin Woods.

Deborah Van Kleeft and Carla Rauten-
berg are longtime residents of Clevel-
dand Heights. Contact them at heights-
democracy@gmail.com.

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OPINION

Become a crusader for democracy

Susie Kasser

I have been writing this column for more than six years. Sometimes I feel like a broken record, repeatedly showcasing the ways in which our community suffers from state laws that inaccurately use tests to define our public schools—and our children—as failures; state laws that take resources appropriated for public school children to pay for private education; and state laws that shift a disproportionate share of the cost of funding public education to local taxpayers, while the state cuts taxes and disinvests.

All of these policies undermine the quality of education available to our youth, increase friction among the stakeholders in the education community, create hostility among neighbors and toward school leaders, make our community less competitive, and weaken our system of public education. The very worst examples of education policy hit us hard. In fact, the Cleveland Heights-University Heights school district is often among the hardest hit.

We are one district among 609, and every school district is part of our state’s public education system. Each of the issues that is injuring us is weakening our system of public education and undermining the fundamental social compact that binds us together in self-government. We need to pay attention to the system itself, because a strong public education system is the key to a great state and a strong democracy.

While my writing and my advocacy are driven by a commitment to equality and to Cleveland Heights, they are also grounded in my passion for democracy. You wouldn’t call me a flag-waving patriot, but I am a wholehearted believer in democracy: government by and for the people. We do have power, and we are responsible for ensuring that all people have an equal voice, equal opportunity, and the capacity to protect their own rights by participating in our democracy.

This is becoming harder to achieve because of growing economic and social inequality, well-funded private- and charter-school interests, a bellicose embrace of white supremacy, and gerrymandered districts that make lawmakers unresponsive to their constituents. The supermajority in the legislature is satisfied with allowing our public system to wither, it is also comfortable with inequality, limited opportunity, unequal participation in self-governance, and a less robust democracy.

Education is the cornerstone of a functioning democracy, so a threat to education is, at its core, a threat to democracy.

In April, about 50 people, who participated in the community discussion of Derek Black’s School House Burning, met to define how we can change education laws and revive the public’s appreciation for the common good. The six small-group discussions were, in themselves, an exercise in democratic participation.

Despite legitimate doubts about the ability to influence the legislature, sitting on the sidelines doesn’t work either. There was energy and excitement about the ability to reach out and engage with more people, and to mobilize those who see the connection between education and democracy, to demand better policies. It gave me hope.

At the beginning of the meeting, several participants shared their views of what they had learned from reading Black’s book, and what it means going forward. They captured the urgency of the moment and what is at stake.

One way to get involved is to join the Heights Coalition for Public Education, and speak up for fair school funding and education in service of the common good. Become a crusader for public education! Nothing less than the future of our democracy is at stake.

Susie Kasser 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.

Free books mailed to your young child!

If your child is 4 years old or younger and lives in Cuyahoga County Please register online at: ImaginationLibrary.com
University Heights stands against COVID-19

A University Heights group is standing together in an effort to end the COVID-19 pandemic once and for all. Their message? “Get vaccinated. Your arm has the power to lift us all up.”

A new public service announcement from University Heights City Hall begins with local nurse and University Heights resident Kat Sigel showing off her post-shot bandage. Also appearing in the PSA are University Heights Symphonic Band conductor Matthew Salvaggio; resident Joanna Homann; M-E Fenn of Odd Dog Coffee; resident Ketti Finneran; school board member Jodi Sourini; Fire Chief Robert Perko and members of the fire department; resident Ron Collier; resident Giovanna Venere; Libby Stineham from Milk & Cookies; Clerk of Council Kelly Thomas; and resident Gina Venere.

Alternate cuts of this PSA will be released in the future. The video is modeled after a similar video from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

To view the video, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_NrEqSTIgk.

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

“When we moved here in 1978,” recalled Zimmerman, “lawn, weeds and a small vegetable garden filled the lot. We added perennial beds and they continue to change.”

This year and last Rebecca West, owner of New Leaf Garden Services of Cleveland Heights, has been working with Gearhart and Zimmerman on the garden’s maintenance and evolution.

The more than 200 sculptures will be labeled with title, medium, and price, if for sale. Visitors will also have a chance to see Gearhart’s carving tools, and even take a whack at a piece of limestone.

This outdoor event will be held rain or shine. Visitors are expected to wear masks, and maintain social distancing. For additional information, contact Gearhart by phone, at 216-904-0255.

Susie Maurer is a residential landscape designer catering to the eastern suburbs of Cleveland. A lover of sculpture and gardens, she is a neighbor of Gearhart and Zimmerman, and is currently pursuing her volunteer master gardener certification through The Ohio State University Extension Program.

A partial view of Fred Gearhart’s sculptures in his Cleveland Heights garden.
The city of Cleveland Heights will celebrate its centennial with a series of learning opportunities and events in 2021. Residents and visitors are invited to learn about the city’s history, share their own stories, and explore Cleveland Heights’ many amenities.

Cleveland Heights officially kicked off its centennial celebration last fall, with the launch of its “All Are Welcome” campaign. It has promoted the campaign throughout the city, with window displays, bus wraps, videos, and discussions on social media.

The city has launched a new microsite, ClevelandHeights100.com, as a hub for centennial information. The site provides a detailed history of the city, accompanied by archival photos. Site visitors can take a virtual tour of city landmarks, learn about iconic businesses and spaces, listen to oral histories, and record their own stories for posterity.

Mary Trupo, Cleveland Heights’ director of communications and public engagement, noted that much of the city’s appeal is reflected not only in its history, but in the architecture and aesthetic of its neighborhoods and commercial districts.

“The city of Cleveland Heights will celebrate its centennial with a series of learning opportunities and events in 2021. Residents and visitors are invited to learn about the city’s history, share their own stories, and explore Cleveland Heights’ many amenities.”

Mary Trupo
Cleveland Heights’ director of communications and public engagement

Opportunities to celebrate the city include a mural project, in which Cleveland Heights-based artists are invited to create an enduring mural in the Noble neighborhood. Proposals are now being accepted. The selected artist will receive a $1,000 stipend for the design, and a professional mural artist will execute the selected idea.

Residents and visitors are also invited to take walking tours through Coventry Village, Dugway Brook, Noble Monticello, and Cedar Fairmount, with audio curated by Cleveland State University’s Center for Public History + Digital Humanities.

The apex of the centennial celebration will take place on Monday, Aug. 9, in a commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the city’s incorporation. The milestone will be marked with a six-foot-tall greeting card signing and a time capsule event.

CH marks centennial with events and tours

Jessica Schantz

“Cleveland Heights has proudly maintained its unique characteristics and charm over the last century. Beautiful and diverse home styles on tree-lined streets differentiate us from many cities in Northeast Ohio,” Trupo said. “This year, we invite our residents and visitors to look around at all that has made Cleveland Heights so special.”

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Jessica Schantz is the e-news manager at the Heights Observer and a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights.
Cleveland Heights City Council Meeting highlights
MARCH 15, 2021
Council members present were Jason Stein (council president), Kahlil Seren (council vice-president), Mary Dunbar, Malody Joy Hart, Davida Russell and Michael N. Ungar. Also present were Susanna Niemann O’Neil, city manager; Amy Himmelen, clerk of council and finance director; William Hanco, law director, and Annette Mckellenburg, police chief.

Legislation
There was a first reading of an ordinance amending the Fair Practices section of the city code to include source of income as a prohibited discriminatory rationale for fair housing practices. Kahlil Seren noted that, by disallowing discrimination against those receiving rental assistance, this ordinance would help ensure that the most vulnerable residents have a safe, secure place to live, and help keep household members in their neighborhoods and schools.

Council seat appointment
In a surprise move, Davida Russell announced she had decided to compromise to break the deadlock, and would vote to approve the appointment of Craig Cobb to the vacant council seat. Before voting, council members commented on the deadlock, concern about giving Cobb an incumbent advantage in the November election, his positive personal characteristics, and the courage of the compromise made by Russell and Malody Joy Hart, who seconded Russell’s motion. The appointment was approved, with Seren voting no, because he opposes appointing an individual to council twice. [Cobb was previously appointed to city council, to fill a prior vacancy.]

MetroHealth’s proposal
Council President Stein stated that this meeting would focus solely on MetroHealth’s proposed building of a behavioral health and addiction services unit at its Severance Circle location, which will create more than 100 good-paying jobs. Specifically, the legislation involves reconfiguration of an ambulance drive and parking lot, which would require the removal of trees on 0.73 acres of land that MetroHealth owns.

Public comments
More than 100 public comments were read, with writers urging that trees be preserved and that the health system rent parking in a largely unused area of Severance mall.

Resolution on the proposal
With Seren voting no, council approved, on emergency, MetroHealth’s proposal, which includes a variance to reduce the parking requirement. Council first passed an amendment proposed by Hart, requiring MetroHealth actively investigate alternative parking.

LWV Observer: Blanche Valancy
APRIL 5, 2021
All council members were present, as were the city manager, clerk of council, and law director. This was Council Member Craig Cobb’s first meeting since his appointment on March 15.

Public comments
There were 107 public comments for this meeting.

Several citizens commented on the MetroHealth Behavioral Health Unit to be built at Severance Circle. Most voiced concerns about cutting trees and not using existing Severance parking.

More than 100 residents commented on fishing in Lower Shaker Lake. Some expressed support for permitting fishing, providing it be regulated with fishing licenses. At least 10 comments opposed opening the lake to fishing. Stein asked that the Community Relations and Recreation Committee take up the issue of opening Lower Shaker Lake to fishing.

Diana Wurzbacher, of Greater Cleveland Congregations (GCC), Housing Task Force, expressed disappointment in council’s lack of response to repeated requests from the task force to prioritize housing issues, especially the blighted vacant properties in the Noble Road area. She also asked council to discuss the Norak Report’s recommendations, and to address problem properties. Stein asked Craig Cobb, chair of council’s Public Safety Committee, to add the GCC concerns to his next committee meeting agenda.

Legislation
Michael Ungar introduced, on first reading, an ordinance to establish a limit of 15 percent of the purchase price on the commission that third parties can charge restaurants for delivering take-out orders.

Seren introduced, on second reading, an ordinance that amends sections of the Fair Practices chapter of the city code to include source of income as a prohibited rationale for fair-housing practices. Stein asked that it be moved to a third reading.

Council approved an agreement with Snider Recreation Inc. to design and install a new, all-inclusive playground at Forest Hill Park.

LWV Observer: Gail Larson
Meeting packets, legislation, and other information can be found on the city website at www.clevelandheights.com/1142/2021-Agendas-and-Minutes. Videos of council meetings can be viewed on the “City of Cleveland Heights, OH” YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/ClevelandHeightsOH.

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

Submit an article to the Heights Observer
is a piece of cake!

1. The Heights Observer is written by people like you. So write something. Use a computer.

2. Register/log in at the Member Center (www.heightsobserver.org).

3. After logging in, click the Submit New Story button in the left-hand column (Don’t see it? It’s nested under “Write”). Then follow the prompts. Hint: keep your original file open so you can easily copy and paste into the text box.

4. Reward yourself! You’re about to be published. We’ll review and edit your article, and let you know if we have any questions.
May 4 - HBC Town Hall: Heights events are held remotely.

May 5 - HBC Bicycle Coalition (HBC) will host a Town Hall on Zoom on Tuesday, May 4, at 7 p.m. This event offers participants the opportunity to ask questions, make comments, and express ideas regarding cycling in the Heights area. You can join this Zoom meeting using the following information: Meeting ID 763 4606 972; Security Passcode 4QsFPm.

May 9 - Ride of Silence: Join cyclists around the country in the annual Ride of Silence. It has taken place on the third Wednesday of May for the last 19 years, to honor the cyclists who have been injured or killed in accidents with motorists. This ride raises awareness and reminds us that we share the roads. This year, the Ride of Silence occurs on May 9 at 7 p.m. Participate in one of the following ways: 1) ride solo; 2) ride with household members or 3) join HBC members, who will ride from John Carroll University to various Heights locations. Details of this ride will be updated on the HBC website and communicated via social media.

May 21 - Bike-to-Work Day: Share your bike-to-work pictures, videos, or stories with us. Are you working from home? Don’t let it stop you. We want to see your work-from-home bike-to-work commute! Let’s make this go viral (in a non-COVID way) using the hashtag #HBCBikeToWork on your Instagram and Facebook posts.

Throughout the month - Commuting routes: HBC wants all cyclists to feel safe commuting by bike. We encourage residents to reach out to us if they need help or want suggestions on planning their commutes. Stay connected to our cycling community via Facebook, Instagram or Strava. We will announce additional details and other initiatives at www.heightsbicyclecoalition.org.

Lake Erie Ink celebrates 10 years

LEI founders Cynthia Larsen and Amy Rosenbluth at the 2020 Kids Comic Con.

Eli Millette

What is the value of a writing workshop for young people? Lake Erie Ink (LEI) believes it has the answer.

For 10 years, LEI has provided a writing space for young people across Northeast Ohio, to empower them and help them find their own voices. The initiative started more than 10 years ago, rooted in the many years that teachers Amy Rosenbluth and Cynthia Larsen had offered creative writing programs for youth in communities on Cleveland’s east side. After learning about work done by 826 Valencia, a nonprofit writing center in San Francisco, the two decided to co-found their own organization focused on providing a safe space for youth to share their stories, and LEI was launched.

“Having a supportive space gives kids the go-ahead to take creative risks,” Rosenbluth noted. “Youth need opportunities to express who they are and how they fit in their world.” LEI works to create these opportunities by collaborating with local teachers, students and parents across Northeast Ohio.

From the annual Kids Comic Con, to published anthologies of teen work, LEI has found a variety of new ways to empower youth.

Most recently, LEI was able to provide a safe, virtual Con experience in which more than 300 attendees explored writing and drawing stories.

After a decade of growth—from two teachers who believed in giving young people the opportunity to express themselves, to a sprawling network of artists, activists, playwrights and educators—LEI remains dedicated to the youth it serves.

So, what is the value of a writing workshop? As one LEI participant put it: “I write so people will read. And when people read, they feel. And when people feel, the world moves.”

Join LEI on May 8 as it celebrates its 10th anniversary with a storytelling event, Spilling Ink. Details about the event and tickets can be found at https://lakeerieink.org/spill-ink.

Eli Millette works as the communications and outreach director at Lake Erie Ink, and lives in Cleveland Heights.
FutureHeights awards mini-grants to 10 projects

Heights Observer May 1, 2021

FutureHeights awards mini-grants to 10 projects that address various social issues and works by BIPOC and LGBTQ composers. For more information visit www.universityheightsband.org.

Cedar Fairmount Arts received $5,000 to transform two vacant lots on Cedar Road, at South Overlook Road and Delaware Drive, into a park for community use, adding much-needed greenspace to the district.

Building Heights was awarded $1,000 for Heights Middle School Shorts, a three-week, mixed-media film arts camp for Cleveland Heights-University Heights middle school students. This funding helps keep the camp free for participants. Learn more at www.heightsmiddleschoolshorts.org.

Friends of the Walt received $750 for the Walter Stinson Park restoration project. Learn more at www.ecologicalheights.com/community-building-projects.

The Noble Cigar Box Guitars project received $500. This inter-generational project will create a workshop for middle schoolers to build and learn to play their own cigar box guitars.

Cedarbrook Society was awarded $500 to host an informational/clean-up event at the Cedar Lee Mini-Park. Learn more at www.cedarbrooktheater.com.

Lower Edgehill Neighbors was awarded $500 for the creation of Sunset Park, a mini-park overlooking Little Italy.

Wizbang Theatre and Circus School was awarded $500 to fund a free two-day camp for children and teens to learn a variety of circus arts. Learn more at www.wizbangtheater.com.

The Millikin Neighborhood Group received $500 to improve a community greenspace next to the former Millikin school and build additional playground equipment.

Friends of Art in the Park received $500 for the Rocks of Kindness event at Walter Stinson Park. This event will bring teens together to decorate rocks with uplifting messages, to be placed in the park for the community to see.

"FutureHeights is grateful to our members, the Cedars Legacy Fund and the McGinty Family Foundation 1989 for their support of this important program," said Deanna Bremer Fisher, FutureHeights executive director.

The next application deadline is Sept. 15, at 5 p.m. To learn more, visit www.futureheights.org/programs/community-building-projects, e-mail sbasu@futureheights.org, or call 216-320-1423.

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

MINI GRANTS

FutureHeights

Sydney Chickos

FutureHeights awarded $6,452 in grants to support 10 projects in Cleveland Heights and University Heights in the spring round of its 2021 Neighborhood Mini-Grants Program.

University Heights Symphonic Band received $1,000 for its 50th Anniversary Celebration. The band plans to use grant funds to purchase new music arrangements that highlight various social issues and works by BIPOC and LGBTQ composers. For more information visit www.universityheightsband.org.

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HRRC’s May programs include tree giveaway

David Brock

Home Repair Resource Center (HRRC) is teaming up with Holden Arboretum for two early May events.

"Ask the Arborist", a free event, will have an opportunity to ask a free tree on Saturday, May 8. Five varieties of trees will be available, and information about them can be found at www.hrrc-ch.org.

On Tuesday, May 18, 6:30 p.m., HRRC will hold an online workshop, "Patio Pavers." The program will cover the principles of creating a paver patio or walkway out of concrete or brick blocks.

To sign up for either class, and to view a full listing of all the workshops HRRC offers, visit www.hrrc-ch.org or call 216-381-6600, ext. 22.

David Brock is HRRC’s education and outreach coordinator.

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David Brock is HRRC’s education and outreach coordinator.

Cercis Canadensis (redbud), a native tree, is one of the varieties available in HRRC’s tree giveaway.

Quercus macrocarpa (bur oak) is also available through HRRC’s tree giveaway.

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In-person learning is back

Karen Rego

The CH-UH school district is officially back to in-person teaching. It’s been a long time coming.

Staying remote for as long as we did was the safest choice for our staff, students, and families. The decisions the district made became more controversial as the year progressed, but it made no sense to return in-person when COVID numbers were on the rise and a vaccine was months away.

There was a lot of pressure to return to in-person instruction, and a lot of pressure not to return. School districts throughout the nation were forced to make difficult decisions. These decisions were never popular with everyone. Our decision makers felt the pressure and listened at all points of view. CH-UH City Schools’ leadership based its decisions on the safety of all concerned. Now it’s time to move forward.

Attention is now focused on our students’ progress over the past year. Are they behind? How will we know? There are state tests that the districts are being forced to administer, but those tests do not necessarily reveal if our students are behind.

In fact, most educators know that these tests give very little useful information. In my opinion, the state tests were designed to justify diverting a large portion of our district’s funding to private schools. As the test results become known, we can expect to see that all schools, even those that have been in-person all year, are going to show that students everywhere have struggled.

Our students will be OK, however. They will accomplish great things in life despite the impact of this challenging year. I am certain that by the start of the next school year, life will return to normal, and teaching and learning as we have previously known it will go on.

Our teachers and students will adjust. Teaching is always a challenge. Often teachers make their work look easy, but that’s not the case. There are so many obstacles that teachers are always working to remove.

The next challenge we face is figuring out how to “do school” the same way we were doing it before the pandemic. Perhaps this is an opportunity to take what we have learned and do better for our students. Maybe what we’ve learned over the past year can help us to be more creative in our instruction.

This past year was not wasted. At the beginning of the next school year, we can’t go backward and just accept that our students made little progress. During the past year, teaching and learning were different—challenging, but productive. We will all come out of this stronger than before, and our students are going to be just fine!

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 president of the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union.

P.E.A.C.E. Park is ideal location for dog park

Judi Robman

[There is] a landslide of support to have a dog park in Cleveland Heights.

I have been in contact with the director of Heights Libraries, which oversees Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Park. I have laid out to her reasons why Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Park is where I believe the dog park should be, but she has turned me down flatly, saying that this area is used for picnics, sledging, and other activities.

I would like to tell you why I think she has made a mistake, and why I have not given up and am appealing to Cleveland Heights residents and the powers-that-be to support a dog park at Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Park.

Over the March 20 weekend, I posted on Nextdoor.com to see if there was support for a dog park. In just a few days, there were more than 100 posts of support.

From what I have heard, residents of Cleveland Heights have wanted this for a very long time but are shut down when they ask, expected to just give up and walk away, no one has listened. So, I am outlining the reasons why this is important to our community.

Why Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Park? It’s centrally located to all. We are a community of dog lovers! Having a dog park [here] offers much more use to the community than any few people throwing a football. People will mingle there much more often and get to know one another. This has happened in Beachwood with [its] dog park.

The area is already mowed and partially fenced. A dog park requires NO MANNING and so gives the expense would be minimal.

The area is already mowed and partially fenced. A dog park requires NO MANNING and so would absolutely reach into their pockets!

The remaining owners have the means but not the will to do what’s needed. If not corrected by inspection and enforcement, the negative conditions they create repulse people who value positive conditions, which opens the door for more negatives.

The situation is dire, but not hopeless. The way forward requires commitment by the new mayor and council to elevate “enforcement of city codes and ordinances” to the top in resident satisfaction. The objective is to establish clearly and unequivocally that if one owns, or considers owning, property in Cleveland Heights, he/she must be willing and able to properly maintain its condition and appearance; and that inspection and enforcement will be diligently employed to secure compliance. It’s a severe stance that goes against the community’s tolerance of differences, but that value does not apply to ill-kept real estate.

It will take years and perseverance to get the needed standards and mindset ingrained. Those who oppose inspection in principle (some in the real estate industry) likely will resist. Some will feel unjustly put upon or discriminated against.

But the choice is clear: either begin to come to grips with the situation, and in time succeed, or continue with the spread of deterioration and economic erosion. The initial focus possibly should be on rental properties (numerous rented single-family homes are a sure sign of something wrong).

That would give owner-occupants time to adjust to new standards and requirements.

Thomas Bier has lived in Cleveland Heights since 1974.

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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 president of the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union.
Heights High swim cadets present hybrid show

Andrea C. Turner

The 2020–21 Cleveland Heights High School Swim Cadets, a 17-member synchronized swim club, will present its annual show May 6–8, 7 p.m., at the Heights High pool, 13263 Cedar Road. The theme of this year’s show is Swim Cadets Undercover.

The club, led by determined young women who sacrificed many of their high school traditions during this pandemic year, did everything in their power to persuade the administration that the show “must go on.”

To follow COVID safety protocols, and because seating is limited to maintain social distancing, only family members of the performers will be allowed to attend in person. Family members must purchase tickets directly from their cadet prior to the performance dates. Attendees must enter through the school’s west entrance for a brief health screening, and must wear a proper face mask to be admitted.

Other community members and students are welcome to view the show, for free, via YouTube livestream each performance night. Viewers watching from home are encouraged to make an online donation. Details on how to do so will be posted on the group’s Facebook and Instagram pages.

High school synchronized swim teams are a rarity, and this group has special significance as the oldest extracurricular club at Heights High, with 82 years in existence. Because of its strong tradition, and emphasis on female empowerment, the club remains popular with multi-generational alumnae.

The students are responsible for all creative aspects of the show, including choreography, music, theater lighting, and costuming, as well as for recruiting “guy cadets” to perform during costume changes.

The club fundraises regularly in order to present a high-level and entertaining production, full of athleticism, grace and teamwork. The annual performance is the result of five months of 12- to 15-hour practices. Julianna Clark, an alumna cadet (2011–15), is the swim cadet advisor.

Sophia Forniti and Anna Turner, both seniors, lead the club as co-presidents. Both have attended district schools since kindergarten. They met and became friends in fourth grade.

“Being a swim cadet has been the highlight of my time at Heights,” said Forniti, who has been a cadet since her freshman year. “This club has allowed me to grow and become the best version of myself. I’m forever grateful that I got to spend nearly every day with this amazing group of hardworking girls. I’m endlessly proud of, and thankful for, each and every member of the team.”

Anna Turner, also a member since ninth grade, added, “This year was a challenge, but the other officers and I have done all we could to make this year as fun and normal as possible! I love this club with all my heart, and I am so thankful to everyone who has been a part of it. Coming to practice each day with team members is the best part of my week, and I will miss it dearly.”

The other swim cadets are seniors Arden Lindberg (treasurer) and Zoe Burns (secretary); juniors Ella Herr (sergeant at arms), Lily Fawcett-Dubow, Sophia Marotta, Estelle Covault, and Serenity Parker; sophomores Ruby Blackman, Rachel O’Keefe, and Clarissa Gorjanc; and freshmen Polly Routh, Lucia Mitchell, Clara Lyford, Harper Walker, and Ruby Tugeau.

Andrea C. Turner is the owner of ACT One Communications, LLC, and is the mother of swim cadet Anna Turner.
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Cleveland Heights-University Heights Board of Education

Meeting highlights

MARCH 16, 2021 [work session]

Board members present were James Frisch (president), Dan Heintz, Malia Lewis, Jodi Sousin and Beverly Wright. Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby and Treasurer Scott Gainer were also present.

Full day five reunion

The board approved a full five-day reunion opening plan to begin April 12. All students in all grades can opt for a full-time return to school, or continue fully remote options. Middle and high school students can also choose to remain in hybrid mode.

The reasons cited for a return to the full-time schedule were 1) the county board of health’s recommendation that students be six feet apart if possible, but allowing that three feet is acceptable; and 2) the number of students at all levels receiving Os or Fs on their report cards.

Strategic planning

Staff members updated the board on the district’s strategic plan and the goals associated with it. Development of the plan started in 2020. Three themes emerged: 1) matters that matter, 2) equity, and 3) telling our own story.

Plan details can be found on BoardDocs.

LWV Observer: Robin Kielien.

MARCH 31, 2021 [special work session]

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

Reopening in person classes

Superintendent Kirby presented the reopening update for the fourth quarter and the five-day-week option. Students can choose between fully in-person, fully remote, and hybrid models. Those choosing the fully in-person model are 75.2 percent of K-5 families, 53.4 percent of grades 6-8 families, and 35.6 percent of grades 9-12 families.

The district will receive rapid COVID testing kits which will be available to anyone who wants one. The operations team has been working with principals to ensure three feet of separation for classrooms and six feet for lunchrooms. Use of cleaning supplies comply with board of health guidance for safe use in classrooms. The wearing of masks continue to be emphasized. Food services has resumed in the schools, and pickup is provided for remote and hybrid learners.

Jodi Sousin requested clarification regarding how students returning from hybrid and remote learning were to be re-acclimated to the new procedures for in-person instruction.

Kirby affirmed that procedures would be reviewed and students would be comfortable with the transition.

James Frisch asked about furniture needs for spacing, and guidance for students heater to return to full in-person learning. Kirby said that counselors and social workers were reaching out to families.

LWV Observer: Rosemarie Fairman.

APRIL 6, 2021

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

Board approvals

The board approved the collective bargaining agreement with the school monitors bargaining unit, as well as Policies 2266 and Policies Group A.

Summer instruction update

Assistant Superintendent Felicia Gould and other administrative staff reported on the district’s summer academic programs and camps, and community partner summer programs.

Financial reports

Scott Gainer presented the February financial report in a new, more detailed format. Board members reacted positively to the new format, and approved the report. The board reached 12 discussion of state auditor performance audits for the April 20 meeting.

Cathen Cavaoghan, supervisor of communications, presented the annual Heights Schools Foundation report. Juliana Johnson, executive director of the foundation, was available to respond to questions about the foundation’s scholarship funding and Cleveland Foundation’s management process.

The board expressed appreciation for the growth in finances and services of the foundation under Johnson’s leadership.

Alternative collective bargaining models

The board discussed exploring alternative collective bargaining models with the federal mediation board and school district bargaining units in hopes of developing a more collaborative and less adversarial collective bargaining process.

LWV finance committee

The board discussed increasing the number of community members on the LWV Finance Committee, and agreed to discuss this at the April 12 joint boards meeting.

EdChoice concerns

Dan Heintz pointed out that 90 percent of EdChoice vouchers are funded by 22 of the more than 600 Ohio school districts. All 22 are high-poverty school districts, and 19 are high minority districts, demonstrating that the system is designed not to improve public school performance through competition, but rather to transfer money from low-income and minority school districts to private schools.

Superintendent Kirby commented on state testing requirements and concerns with language in SB 88, which specifies that, despite pandemic disruptions, testing this spring will be used in identifying EdChoice voucher schools.

LWV Observer: Kathy Petrey.

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Heights Libraries offers free take-home COVID tests

Library launches new tablet-lending program

Heights Libraries is trying to bridge the “digital divide,” the gap between necessary technology and those who have trouble accessing it.

“While people can use public computers at the library again, they still have to keep their masks on, which makes things like virtual meetings and job interviews difficult,” said Heights Libraries Director Nancy Levin. “And our public computers have time limits, which makes it difficult for users who need extended time for accessible in every Ohio county, and Ohio's public libraries, including Heights Libraries, will play a critical role.”

According to the Ohio Library Council, “Testing alone is not going to end the pandemic, but public libraries can help make the kits easily accessible to their communities, and fight COVID-19.”

To use the kit, a library customer must have access to the following:

- A Windows or Mac/Apple laptop with a webcam, or a desktop computer with an adjustable/ moveable webcam, a microphone, and a speaker
- An Apple phone/tablet, or an Android phone/tablet
- An e-mail address
- An Internet connection

During library business hours, customers may request a test at a designated desk inside a library building (this will vary by branch), or over the phone for curbside pickup. For more information, and to request a test, contact Heights Libraries branches at:

- Coventry Branch: 216-321-3400
- Lee Road Branch: 216-912-3600
- Noble Branch: 216-291-5665
- University Heights Branch: 216-321-4700

Customers can request more than one test, and return for additional tests. They do not need to prove they need the tests.

Library staff cannot offer guidance or assistance with test taking, and customers may not take the test in library buildings; they must do so off-site.

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

Heights Libraries is providing free, at-home, COVID-19 rapid testing kits to any adult in the community who needs one.

The tests, the Abbott BinaxNOW Rapid COVID-19 Antigen At-Home Test, were provided by the Ohio Department of Health. Gov. Mike DeWine’s goal is to make these rapid-testing kits available and accessible in every Ohio county, and Ohio’s public libraries, including Heights Libraries, will play a critical role.

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- A Windows or Mac/Apple laptop with a webcam, or a desktop computer with an adjustable/ moveable webcam, a microphone, and a speaker
- An Apple phone/tablet, or an Android phone/tablet
- An e-mail address
- An Internet connection

During library business hours, customers may request a test at a designated desk inside a library building (this will vary by branch), or over the phone for curbside pickup. For more information, and to request a test, contact Heights Libraries branches at:

- Coventry Branch: 216-321-3400
- Lee Road Branch: 216-912-3600
- Noble Branch: 216-291-5665
- University Heights Branch: 216-321-4700

Customers can request more than one test, and return for additional tests. They do not need to prove they need the tests.

Library staff cannot offer guidance or assistance with test taking, and customers may not take the test in library buildings; they must do so off-site.

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

A former nurse that radiates kindness, Lillian grew up in Bainbridge and made the move to South Franklin Circle in 2019. Relishing the bustling activities in her new community, Lillian quickly joined in for social gatherings, exercise programs, and card groups with fellow residents.

“We go for walks, we talk, and I’m able to meet lovely people. The warm, caring staff is just icing on the cake. I can’t begin to say how comforting that is,” says Lillian.

Read the full story at judsonsmartliving.org/blog

Cleveland Heights – University Heights Public Library Board
Meeting highlights
MARCH 15, 2021

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

Financial and investment report
The board reviewed and accepted the February 2021 financial statement. Total cash balance across the operating accounts, Bauer Fund accounts, and investment accounts was $20,893,176.

Contract amendments
The board amended the contract with JMC Consulting, for the HVAC project at the Coventry Village Library and assistance with community engagement for the PEACE Park playground changes, increasing the amount to a total of $36,000 for the period of January 2021 to December 2021.

The board amended the contract with MacMillan & Company, increasing the contract amount by $18,750 to include program, design, and participation in the request for proposal for the renovation of the Coventry branch basement, as well as criteria engineering and design of the HVAC system.

Technology expenditure
The board approved computer purchases for the public and for staff to the amount of $18,737.

Service updates
The library has gradually reopened with limited services, and is currently preparing for the restoration of regular service hours and expanded services by backfilling jobs that were frozen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirteen vacancies are currently being filled to meet expanded hours. Computer times have been expanded to one hour. Curbside delivery will be available until 7 p.m. now that daylight saving time is in effect.

COVID test kits
The library has received a large shipment of COVID test kits from the state of Ohio and will be distributing them to the public. Distribution is currently limited to two per person. The test kits will be available via curbside delivery.

Public service report
Local History Librarian Jessica Robinson hosted a zoom event, Resisting Segregation: Cleveland Heights Residents Shape Their Community, 1964-1976, with author Susan Kaeser, a Cleveland Heights resident.

A three-session, virtual program on diversity through the arts was held in partnership with the Diversity Center of Cleveland.

Youth Services Associate Catherine Bransky hosted a pop-up program on snow painting at Walter Stinson Community Park. The 15 attendees made artwork in the snow using colored water and squirt bottles.

Purchase approval
The board approved the purchase of Noble Presbyterian Church, at 2780 Kirkwood Road, for $315,000. The property is contiguous to the Noble Branch on Noble Road, which the library is looking to expand.

LWV Observer: Elizabeth M. Tracy.

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

2020 YEAR IN REVIEW

- Total sales volume: $18 million
- Homes sold: 72
- Average days from list to close: 29
- 37 sellers, 35 buyers
- List to Sale Price: 99%
- List to Buy Price: 97%
The shoppe on the corner

David Budin

My birthday is in May, and I’m thinking of one birthday in particular—my fourth. On that day, my uncle happened to be visiting his mother, my great aunt, who lived downstairs from my family, in the duplex she owned on Belmar. I was playing in the front yard when my uncle found out it was my birthday and said to me, “Let’s take a ride.” I climbed into his big black Cadillac and we drove about four blocks east to Snedeker’s Toy Shoppe, on the southwest corner of Mayfield and Superior roads.

Snedeker’s was not a huge place, but it had every kind of kids’ toy, game and trick you could want. My uncle, Danny Budin, who owned the then-famous Budin’s Delicatessen, was known for his generosity. Uncle Danny told me to pick out anything I wanted, for my birthday. I looked around and picked a teddy bear. He said, “Is that all you want? Get something else.” So, I got something else. He said, “Do you want anything else? How about that?” pointing at another toy. I said, “Okay.” Then he said, “How about one of those?” I said, “Okay.” That went on until I had picked 10 or 12 toys, with Uncle Danny laughing the whole time. Uncle Danny paid for the toys, Mrs. Snedeker stuffed them all into bags, and we went back home. It’s a great memory. And I can still picture that whole store from that day, as long ago as it was.

I went to Snedeker’s often. My mother used to walk there with me in my stroller. Then I would stop in on my way home from Roosevelt Junior High, and as a teenager, in the summer, on my way to Cumberland Park to play baseball. I would buy every new gum that tasted like garlic . . . a plastic “ice cube”; a fake tooth at the end of a toothpick; imitation cigarettes that appeared to glow when you puffed on them; a telescope that put a black ring around the user’s eye; real chewing gum that turned into, essentially, a mouse trap when someone tried to pull out a stick of gum; a real fly inside a plastic “ice cube”; a fake tooth at the end of a toothpick; imitation cigarettes that appeared to glow when you puffed on them; a telescope that put a black ring around the user’s eye; real chewing gum that tasted like garlic . . .

The store had disappeared by the time I started high school. A couple of years ago, I was looking around on a Cleveland Heights Facebook group. The subject of Snedeker’s came up and everyone who remembered it had a fond memories of the place. Then, a someone named Art Snedeker appeared in the group.

I immediately asked Art the obvious question, and the answer was yes, the toy store was owned and operated by his parents, Arthur and Theresa Snedeker. Connecting with Art was like opening a little door to my past. He’s around my age and he got to hang out in the store. In fact, he and the store both came along around the same time. He was 11 when his parents let him start ringing up some customers. I was probably one of those he waited on.

“My parents claimed it was the first ‘full-time’ toy store in Cleveland,” Art said. “Full-time meaning it wasn’t seasonal like the department stores, and that it only sold children’s toys.” Art wasn’t allowed to play with the merchandise—though “somehow,” he said, “I did get my favorite toys at Christmas, for a kid of the ‘50s—a Davy Crockett cap and rifle, Lincoln Logs, a Mickey Mouse hat, toy soldiers, Dinky toy army vehicles, a Hula Hoop, and my red Columbia, that I still had until my late 20s.”

Art was amused when I mentioned the little practical jokes I bought so many of, because, he said, that was his father’s favorite little area of the business, and his responsibility. The Snedekers sold the business in 1965, and it stayed open, under their name, until the building was razed to build a car dealership. His parents, who had first met working for Best & Co., a clothing store in the Cedar-Fairmount district, went into the restaurant business, together, until retiring in the early 80s.

Art went to college with the plan of majoring in pre-med. But during his first year at college, he said, he “started to ask some life questions of my friends and of the Newman Center chaplain. By my sophomore year I entered the seminary here in Cleveland, quite to the surprise of my family and many of my friends. I was ordained in 1974 and I served as everything from assistant pastor, pastor, and campus minister, to hospital chaplain and hospice chaplain. I began a medical retirement in 2011, and, although retired, I live at a local parish and help with Sunday and weekday Masses.”

He has spent a lot of his life bringing comfort to people—in both parts of his life.

David Budin is a freelance writer for national and local publications; the former editor of Cleveland Magazine and Northern Ohio Lives, an author, and a professional musician and comedian. His writing focuses on the arts and especially pop music history.
Student interns curate ‘Innate Environments’

Heights Arts is known for celebrating art in many forms at its longstanding Cleveland Heights gallery. That especially includes up-and-coming artists. This spring, Heights Arts presents Innate Environments, and a Spotlight showcase, both celebrating new talent. The concurrent exhibitions run Friday, May 21, through Sunday, June 13, at Heights Arts gallery, 2175 Lee Road.

Heights Arts interns Zelda Thayer-Hansen and Eryn Lawsonn curated Innate Environments. They created a show that acknowledges nature in its unsightly truths and inherent beauty, all while evaluating humanity’s existence within the natural world, through photography, graphic design, and mixed media. The two interns share the Spotlight showcase adjacent to the exhibition.

“This internship at Heights Arts has opened my eyes to the hidden world of gallery curation,” said Thayer-Hansen. “I’ve gotten to meet such amazing local artists and creatives through this opportunity. And, most of all, getting the opportunity to show the work of my peers shows how lucky we are to have such an amazing community and such devoted art teachers supporting us.”

The internship program at Heights Arts looks to connect teachers supporting us.”

The internship program at Heights Arts looks to connect the seasoned, knowledgeable artists who have long been part of other Heights Arts programs—including exhibitions, musical events, and the Heights Arts store—with new, young artists from Cleveland Heights High School.

Innate Environments opens following the close of the 2021 Group Show, on Sunday, May 16. The public is encouraged to visit in person for safe, socially distanced viewing.

Visit www.heightsarts.org/events for information on Innate Environments’ opening night.

Reach Heights Arts marketing intern Megan Gallagher at marketing@heightsarts.org.

UH Symphonic Band resumes practices and performances

Last year, the University Heights Symphonic Band adapted to an unprecedented summer to share its love of music with the community. Outdoor rehearsals, social distancing, and all the other precautions put in place due to the pandemic proved well worth it, as the band capped the summer with several recording sessions at Walter Stinson Park.

Now, with declining COVID cases, a vaccine rollout, and summer again in our sights, the full band will be back together for the first time since March 8, 2020.

Starting May 6, band members will rehearse at John Carroll University every Thursday, from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Following CDC guidelines, the band will rehearse outside, be socially distanced, and musicians will play wearing special masks that minimize aerosol spread.

Though the band performs year-round, summer is typically its busiest time of year. Band members spend every Thursday evening in June and July performing at various venues throughout Greater Cleveland. Currently, the band has four performances on the books for this summer, with several others in the works. This year’s summer season will kick off with a patriotic concert for the city of University Heights at John Carroll University on Thursday, July 1.

Not being able to make music has been difficult for many throughout the pandemic, and the band has actually seen an increase in applications. For a complete list of performances, or for information about joining the band, visit www.universityheightsband.org.

Matthew Salvaggio currently serves as music director of the Euclid Symphony Orchestra and the University Heights Symphonic Band.
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TO OUR LOYAL CUSTOMERS & FRIENDS:

THANK YOU!

Everyone at Tommy’s would like to send a heartfelt thank you to the Heights Observer and all of our committed and loyal customers who voted for us for Best of The Heights Finalist 2021.

2020 was a tough year that offered us many obstacles, but the flexibility and support of our customers and community helped us to overcome these hurdles and create a whole new Tommy’s that we would have never known existed.

Your votes for “Best Curbside Pickup,” “Best Community-Conscious Business,” “Best Employee Pandemic Support” and “Best Socially Distanced Dining” are valued more than words can describe. When we decided to re-open in May, these were our priorities. We wanted to keep our employees and customers safe while providing the same quality food and service as before the pandemic.

We are grateful to all of you for being a part of this process. We are also thankful for the other awards we received; they are the icing on the cake!! Always remember that Tommy’s is here for you, but most importantly, Tommy’s is here BECAUSE of you!!

Love,

Tommy

tommyscoventry.com
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