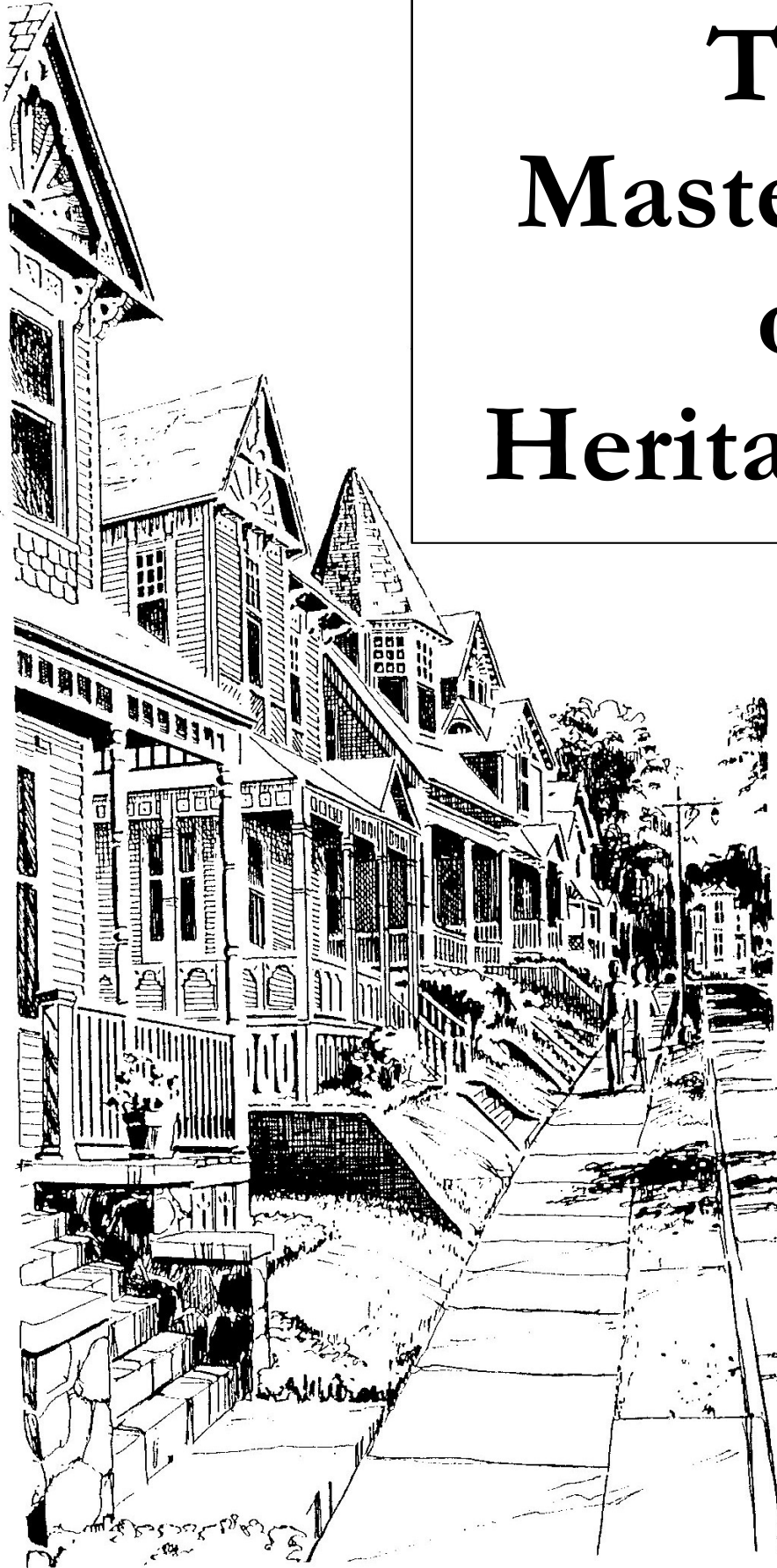


# The Master Plan of Heritage Hill



**The Heritage Hill  
Association  
February 15, 2005**

# **The Master Plan Of Heritage Hill**

Adopted February 15, 2005  
Heritage Hill Association  
Board of Directors

# **Heritage Hill Association Neighborhood Master Plan**

**Adopted by the Heritage Hill Association Board of Directors  
February 15, 2005**

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## **I. Introduction and Background**

### **Purpose**

This update to *The Master Plan of Heritage Hill* is the latest effort to protect and preserve the neighborhood known as Heritage Hill. More than 35 years ago, residents joined together to establish a historic district, allowed under Federal law, to save the neighborhood from the threat of what was then known as urban renewal. This initiative was successful and led to decades of collaborative activity among neighbors and like-minded citizens to stabilize and strengthen the neighborhood that reflected in its built structures the early history of the City of Grand Rapids. It has once again become a strong, vibrant neighborhood of diverse people living together. This vision is reflected in the Heritage Hill (neighborhood) Association's purpose "to provide neighbors a way of collectively building a healthy, historically preserved community in which people can live and work in a secure and stable environment."

In 1988, the Heritage Hill Association adopted its first written plan. This current document is an update to that plan and reflects the consensus of opinions, ideals and directions of Heritage Hill residents. Its purpose is threefold:

- ◆ to set an agenda for the Heritage Hill Association and Foundation to continue their work in improving the quality of life in the neighborhood;
- ◆ to guide decisions by City boards and departments which will directly affect the neighborhood (in conjunction with the major revision in Grand Rapids' own Master Plan);
- ◆ to provide guidance to residents and property owners in the neighborhood who wish to improve their properties and provide for the necessities of present-day living in ways that are sensitive to the predominately residential and historic character of the district.

The original 1988 master plan was submitted and adopted by the City's Planning Commission as a guide in making decisions that reflected the desires and interests of neighborhood residents. It has been a living document that has guided the Association's activities and been used in taking consistent positions to present to City boards and committees, nearby institutions and property owners.

### **Process**

The process of updating *The Master Plan of Heritage Hill* included guidance by a Master Plan Committee, a survey of neighborhood residents, open meetings, review of census data and solicitation of views through the neighborhood newsletter. During 2001, Grand Valley State University worked with the Heritage Hill Association in conducting a detailed survey on resident views on a variety of issues. The results were compiled by Grand Valley State University and presented to the Association. (See Section III) In addition to the data gained from the survey, updated census data was compiled and compared to identify changes in neighborhood population and housing patterns.

After this information was gathered, four open meetings were held in August and September, 2003 to encourage residents to give their perspectives on and discuss issues affecting the neighborhood. Each of the meetings had a specific topic area to be discussed, although residents were free to raise any issue of interest to them after the topic of the meeting had been discussed.

The four topics were: traffic and parking, crime and vandalism, education and block clubs, and commercial zoning or other issues. During the subsequent Association Annual Meeting in December 2003, the process of updating the master plan was explained and preliminary ideas for revising the policy positions were introduced.

The aforementioned activity was announced and reported in the Association's newsletter, the *Heritage Herald*, to ensure that all interested residents had opportunities to present their concerns or problems, and possible ideas on how to resolve them.

## **II. Linkages to the City of Grand Rapid's new Master Plan, *Plan Grand Rapids***

While the 1988 *Master Plan of Heritage Hill* pre-dated the present *Plan Grand Rapids* by 15 years, it presaged the view of neighborhoods outlined by the City of Grand Rapids in 2003. The first goal in the new plan is "Great Neighborhoods." It quotes planner Peter Calthorpe's prescription for great neighborhoods as including:

- ◆ walkable streets,
- ◆ human-scale blocks,
- ◆ a variety of housing choices,
- ◆ usable public spaces,
- ◆ an identifiable center formed by civic institutions, local shopping and services, and
- ◆ definable edges.

*The strong neighborhood which has developed since the historic preservation movement overcame the threat of the urban renewal program in this area of fine old residences is one of the best examples showing the value of a neighborhood-based strategy for the whole city.*

The walkable streets, human-scale blocks, and housing choices define Heritage Hill. This current Master Plan calls for more park space, although there are several highly-valued small parks and school playgrounds. Heritage Hill does not have an identifiable center – it is characterized more by its strong edges with major streets where some retailing and a number of city-wide institutions are located. Maintaining some neighborhood-level retailing is an important goal of this Master Plan.

Heritage Hill meets the Plan Grand Rapids' description of a stable neighborhood, with

- ◆ a low (24%), but gradually growing, percentage of owner-occupancy,
- ◆ most rental units being well-managed (many of them by residents of the neighborhood),
- ◆ well constructed homes which have enjoyed a high level of maintenance since designation as a historic district, and
- ◆ increasing housing values.

Recommended strategies for stable neighborhoods, as reflected in *Plan Grand Rapids* include:

- ◆ traffic-calming (in increasing use, and supported by this plan),
- ◆ strong housing code enforcement (a long-time priority of the Heritage Hill Association and this plan),
- ◆ historic preservation (how this neighborhood is defined),
- ◆ maintenance of infrastructure (a number of street and sewer projects have been done,

- ♦ although more is always needed), and neighborhood organization (the Association is one of the oldest and strongest in the City).

The strong neighborhood which has developed since the historic preservation movement overcame the threat of the urban renewal program in this area of fine old residences is one of the best examples showing the value of a neighborhood-based strategy for the whole city.

### III. Results from the 2001 Survey

As part of revising *The Master Plan of Heritage Hill*, the Grand Valley State University conducted a survey in 2001 in order to find out how current residents viewed the neighborhood, and what concerns and problems they saw. The survey covered the following areas: demographics of respondents, education, city services, safety, historic preservation, diversity, land use, the Heritage Hill Association, neighborhood priorities, areas of special concern and a “soapbox” for additional comments.

While the full survey results are available in the Heritage Hill Association’s office, the following presents a brief overview of the findings. A total of 549 residents responded to the survey answering specific questions and adding comments to cover topics of concern to them. Not everyone answered all the questions. Perhaps most interestingly, the survey found that the views and aspirations of the neighborhood in 2001 were very similar to those identified in the survey and interviews done in 1987 as part of the earlier master plan development.

#### Education

*Schools continue to be a concern and priority to residents.*

Schools continue to be a concern and priority to residents. While more than half of survey respondents said public elementary education was satisfactory, less than half felt the same about

public middle and high schools. About 12% reported having children attending school. During the public meetings connected with this plan revision, there was more discussion about education. These focused on ways in which neighbors could be more involved with the schools serving the neighborhood and led to strengthened policy statements on education in this plan.

#### City Services

While most City services were considered good or excellent by most survey respondents, the most troubling areas to respondents were road repair, speed enforcement, traffic, parking and violation enforcement. Speeding, snow plowing (or lack thereof) and parking were the major concerns mentioned. While only half of respondents had contacted the City about the problems with its services, two-thirds of those who did felt their experiences were quite positive.

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Few problems cited were seen as widespread among residents, but just over a third felt the following problems on their block were severe or very severe: speeding, insufficient off-street parking (either for respondent or others on the block), and crowded parking conditions. From a fifth to a quarter felt noise, heavy trucks, buses, loitering or alley conditions were severe or very severe concerns.

Unlike the general issues like traffic or speeding, problems with particular residences seemed to be more isolated and shared by a small number of neighbors. While slightly more than a fifth of respondents reported five or more “problem” residences, 41% said there were no such problem properties and another 28% said there was only one or two on their blocks. This illustrates well the impact that historic preservation and an active neighborhood association (made up of neighbors) have had in improving the neighborhood over the last 30 plus years.

### **Safety**

Due in part to an active neighborhood crime prevention program, nine of ten respondents felt safe in their homes or walking around during daylight. This drops to 56% evening hours (7 pm – midnight). A feeling of being unsafe was

*... . nine of ten respondents felt safe in their homes or walking around during daylight. This drops to 56% evening hours (7 pm – midnight). A feeling of being unsafe was concentrated in just a few areas.*

concentrated in just a few areas. The most common problem cited was loud car stereos, followed by noisy neighbors and unwanted peddling or vagrancy. Interestingly, while only a fifth considered peddling/vagrancy a common problem, over two-thirds had been approached in the last five years. Just over a quarter of respondents had had their cars broken into in the last five years and other minor crimes were noted.

### **Historic Preservation**

The City enacted an ordinance to protect designated historic properties or districts within the city. The City’s Historic Preservation Commission oversees and acts on proposed exterior changes or repairs to Heritage Hill properties. In survey responses, there was a wide range of opinions on the process and having to adhere to historic standards and materials. Over two-thirds of respondents felt the rules governing the historic preservation process were appropriate. Of those who had submitted applications during the last five years, over 70% rated the process as good or excellent. Only 7% rated it poor.

*Over two-thirds of respondents felt the rules governing the historic preservation process were appropriate.*

The additional comments added by respondents were similar to those in the previous 1987 survey. These comments included a lack of consistency in applying or enforcing historic preservation standards, needing to use materials which are consistent with the original materials, the high cost of meeting historic standards, and a lack of knowledge about the rules or the process. It should be noted that in recent years, guidelines have been developed to guide residents and the process has been made more consistent. The City and the Heritage Hill

Association have made many regular efforts to communicate information about historic preservation.

### **Diversity**

*More than 80% chose to live in Heritage Hill because it's close to downtown, the homes are historic with unique architecture and it has high quality, affordable housing . . . . (and) felt that the Heritage Hill Association should work to retain economic, racial and social diversity.*

There are many reasons why people choose to live in a particular neighborhood. More than 80% chose to live in Heritage Hill because it's close to downtown, the homes are historic with unique architecture and it has high quality, affordable housing. Sixty percent or more of respondents also believed that living in a multi-racial neighborhood is important, there is a diversity of residents and lifestyles and it is close to work or school. On the issue of high housing or rental costs driving middle-income families out of the neighborhood, half of the respondents shared the concern while the other half didn't.

An overwhelming majority (80%) felt that the Heritage Hill Association should work to retain economic, racial and social diversity. There seemed to be a consensus that the Heritage Hill Association should work to preserve and upgrade the general quality of life, communication, fairness and the equity of services for all neighbors regardless of their economic, racial or social characteristics. While the Association doesn't have control over many of the issues that impact neighbors, the Association should continually raise the issues for discussion, and of course, action where appropriate.

### **Land Use**

The survey strongly supported current Heritage Hill Association policies regarding how properties are used. There was strong agreement among respondents (80%) that houses used for residential purposes should not be allowed to be converted to commercial or institutional use. Similarly, around two-thirds felt that single family homes should stay that way and multi-family properties should not be allowed to add more units. Two-thirds felt that the current mix of institutional and commercial uses was just about right. More than seventy percent of respondents were concerned about the demolition of properties for parking lots in or near the neighborhood as well as the expansion of institutions. More than half were concerned about the closure of neighborhood schools and of recreational opportunities in and around the neighborhood. More than half were concerned about the adequacy of public transportation.

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## **Heritage Hill Association**

Survey respondents answered questions about the Heritage Hill Association. The responses varied, but most respondents were aware of the Association itself and high visibility activities like the Tour of Homes and the newsletter. There was more limited awareness of things like victim assistance and other less visible functions of the Association. More than half offered additional comments about the issues and the Association. They generally reinforced the findings of the survey.

## **IV. Policy Statements by Topic**

### **A. Commercial/Institutional**

1. Maintain firm zoning boundaries to prevent spot zoning and to reflect current and desired use.
2. Encourage commercial and institutional development and use within defined areas.
3. Support enforcement of commercial code.
4. Encourage the use of existing structures for the purposes for which they were built: Commercial for commercial and residential for residential.
5. Be pro-active in involving HH Association in planning for commercial and institutional development.
6. Encourage historic Business/Traditional Business zoning districts to favor neighborhood service usage.
7. Encourage resident support of neighborhood business and services.
8. Educate developers of commercial and institutional properties to be sensitive to adjacent historic and/or residential structures.
9. Maintain cooperative planning with public and private agencies working on issues dealing with Michigan Street, State Street and Wealthy Street.

### **B. Traffic and Parking**

1. Increase monitoring and enforcement of traffic laws.
2. Encourage periodic analysis of traffic volume, speed and flow.
3. Establish ad-hoc parking committees to respond to community needs.
4. Develop a campaign to encourage resident reporting of traffic problems.
5. Encourage traffic calming solutions on individual streets.

6. Secure optional off-street parking in existing or new facilities.
7. Encourage joint development of alternative mass parking areas by the City, institutions and businesses in and adjacent to HH.
8. Promote public and corporate/institutional transit services as an optional means of moving volumes of students, employees and visitors into and out of the neighborhood.
9. Maintain street widths at their current dimensions.

**C. Historic Preservation and Amenities**

1. Support continued and consistent enforcement of the preservation ordinance, while insuring that guidelines used are consistent with those issued by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior.
2. Encourage HHA resident participation in the Historic Preservation Commission.
3. Educate and assist property owners and the Historic Preservation Commission to meet the intent of the ordinance.
4. Encourage the city to establish a notification system for neighbors of projects to be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission.
5. Encourage appropriate infill development on vacant parcels.
6. Advocate for the historic elements of streetscape and public building, including school buildings.
7. Regulate the installation of new or replacement utilities, public pavements and street furniture to be compatible with the historic nature of the streetscape.
8. Encourage the maintenance of the exterior and grounds of commercial and institutional structures in a historically appropriate condition.
9. Maintain small neighborhood parks.
10. Encourage maintenance and improvement of school related playgrounds.
11. Encourage the improvement of existing parking areas.
12. Determine the need for current alleys and improve or close them.

#### **D. Housing**

1. Rigorously scrutinize any requests to increase density in existing residences.
2. Encourage HH residents to seek appointment to the Zoning and Housing Appeals Boards and the Planning, Historic Preservation and Parking Commissions.
3. Encourage HH residents to participate in hearings held by zoning, housing appeals, preservation, planning and other boards and commissions which may affect the neighborhood.
4. Redraw zoning boundaries to reflect current and desired use and density.
5. Monitor consistent enforcement of the housing code.
6. Advocate maintenance of significant minimum fines for housing code violations.
7. Educate residents regarding the housing code.
8. Establish staged timelines for major rehabilitation projects to maintain control while encouraging quality workmanship.
9. Push for placement of hard-core substandard housing into receivership
10. Promote the various housing opportunities in HH to attract a broad range of residents.
11. Coordinate existing city and state financial aid to property owners.
12. Encourage HH residents to purchase, improve and maintain substandard properties.
13. Monitor the operation and establishment of regulated group residential facilities to ensure they comply with applicable regulations and contribute to the vitality of the neighborhood.

#### **E. Relationships with Institutions and Surrounding Neighborhoods**

1. Establish formal mechanisms, including the Heritage Herald and periodic meetings, to work with existing institutions and businesses regarding neighborhood concerns and planning developments.
2. Encourage early involvement of HH Association in planning for commercial and institutional development.
3. Meet regularly with adjacent neighborhood associations to develop coordinated strategies that enhance overall neighborhood improvement.

## **F. Public Safety**

1. Increase direct public involvement in safety programs and practices.
2. Develop greater mutual cooperation and support between HH programs and the Grand Rapids Police Department.
3. Coordinate HH public safety programs with other community resources.
4. Encourage HH Board of Directors leadership in public safety matters.

## **G. Education**

1. Maintain HH Board liaisons to work with the Grand Rapids Public Schools and other local schools on planning to meet the educational needs of children throughout HH.
2. Develop current reference materials on school facilities, programs and requirements and make them available to residents, potential residents, and realtors; set up a referral system for people to meet with parents of children in schools of interest.
3. Work with public and private schools and public safety officials on safety at and to and from schools.
4. Advocate for needed resources, support appropriate millage campaigns and programs for neighborhood schools, and promote participation of HH residents in school mentorship and volunteer programs.
5. Work with the Grand Rapids Public Schools to ensure proper building and grounds maintenance, encouraging schools within the historic district to follow historic guidelines.

## V. Appendix

### **Master Plan Committee Members:**

#### **Chris Bailey**

Resident of Heritage Hill – 4 years  
Heritage Hill Association Board Member – 3 years

Project Manager – Spectrum Health

City of Grand Rapids Community Development Citizens Committee – 3 years  
Grand Rapids Cool Cities Advisory Group – 3 years  
City of Grand Rapids Arts and Entertainment Strategy Steering Committee (2004)  
Mayor George Heartwell's WiFi Committee (2004)  
City of Grand Rapids Board of Zoning Appeals – 1 year

#### **Tom Logan**

Resident of Heritage Hill – 21 years  
Heritage Hill Association – 1988 Master Plan Committee  
Heritage Hill Association Tour Historian – 15 years, Co-Chairperson, Home Host, and Volunteer  
Heritage Hill Association Food Booth – Volunteer  
Heritage Hill Rental Property Owner, Renovating Homes in Heritage Hill & East Hills

Professional Planner – Health System & Human Services, Historic Preservation and Urban Design

City of Grand Rapids Historic Preservation Commission – 6 years  
Meyer May House Docent  
Author: *Almost Lost: Building and Preserving Heritage Hill, Grand Rapids, Michigan* (2004)

#### **Craig Nobbelin**

Resident of Heritage Hill – 19 years  
Heritage Hill Association – 1988 Master Plan Committee  
Heritage Hill Association – Past Board President, Member – 12 years  
Heritage Hill Association – Chair, Zoning Committee  
Heritage Hill Association Tour – Weekend Ticket Coordinator, Home Host  
Heritage Hill Association Food Booth – Co-Chair, Volunteer  
Heritage Hill Rental Property Owner, Renovating Homes in Heritage Hill

Health and Human Services Planner/Consultant

South East Economic Development Corporation – Past Board President, Member – 15 years  
Wealthy Theatre – 5 years, Board President, Member  
United Growth – Neighborhood Representative

#### **Jim Payne**

Resident of Heritage Hill – 24 years  
Heritage Hill Association – Past Board Member – 4 years  
Heritage Hill Association Tour – Home Host, House Captain, Guide  
Heritage Hill Association Tour Food Booth – NCBC  
North College Block Club – Past President, Perennial Board Member

Downtown Management Board – 2 years, Member  
Kent County Literacy Council  
DA Blodgett Services for Children – Big Brother

**Mary Robinson**

Resident of Heritage Hill – 19 years  
Heritage Hill Association – Past Board President, Member – 7 years  
Heritage Hill Association – Zoning Committee  
Heritage Hill Association Tour – House Captain, Volunteer  
Heritage Hill Association Food Booth – Volunteer

Davenport University – Instructor  
Non-profit Management Consultant

South East Economic Development, Former Executive Director

**Survey Coordinator and Association Data Compilers:**

**Richard Jelier, Ph.D.**

Coordinated the development, implementation and data processing of the 2001 Survey that gathered the information from over 500 residents in Heritage Hill. Supervised the work of graduate students in carrying out this work.

Associate Professor at Grand Valley State University, School of Public and Nonprofit Administration  
Resident of Heritage Hill – 9 years  
Heritage Hill Association – Board Member - 4 years

**J.B. Allen**

Helped to compile the data that was gathered by GVSU  
Resident of Heritage Hill – Grew up in Heritage Hill  
Heritage Hill Association – Board Member - 3 years

**Barbara Hekhuis**

Helped to compile the data that was gathered by GVSU  
Heritage Hill Association – Board Member – 3 years  
Resident of Heritage Hill – 22 years

**Jan Earl**

Assisted in survey development, implementation and data compilation  
Heritage Hill Executive Director – 21 years  
Resident of Heritage Hill – 22 years

**Barbara Lester**

Helped to compile the data that was gathered by GVSU  
Heritage Hill Association Crime Prevention Coordinator – 19 years