

# Historic Preservation Commission

## 2014 Annual Report







# Preservation and the Community

Historic Preservation developed nationwide as a way to safeguard the heritage of cities during a time where whole sale demolitions were leading to the loss of community identities. Through Preservation historic structures and objects that reflect elements of a city's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history were saved thus helping to retain a community's sense of place. As Preservation developed and spread it quickly became evident that it was also an effective tool in stabilizing neighborhoods, improving property values and creating a more vibrant and desirable community.

It is well documented that Preservation generates economic benefits through both direct and indirect means. Such benefits include: improved property values leading to more tax revenue; stimulation of private investment; creation of new jobs; increased sales tax; compatible land-use patterns; and enhanced quality of life. These combined with the aesthetics and pride established through preserving our local heritage leads to a strong and desirable community; a key component in drawing people in for both recreational/tourist purposes as well as those looking for a new place to live and work.

Examples of Preservation as a stabilizing tool abound in Grand Rapids, from the commercial warehouse district of Heartside to the residential district of Cherry Hill and more. These financial benefits to owners and community can be seen through higher property values that are documented in the Assessors records as well as the real estate market.

Some wonder if Preservation has served its purpose and whether or not it still holds value. The answer to this question is yes, Preservation does continue to be an important tool in not only maintaining property values but in attracting new

owners and keeping the areas vital. Although designation does come with extra “hoops” for owners it also ensures that certain standards are maintained across the board and that private investments will not be lost should neighboring properties decline or chose to devalue their property through inappropriate alterations. The importance of security of investment is something developers and investors have recognized for years. They have utilized the same methodology seen in Preservation for modern developments of both individual homes as well as condo communities. Many new developments have required bylaws/covenants and restrictions for their community, that is typically handled through a neighborhood association or committee. They often include restrictions on paint colors, lawn ornaments, additions, outbuildings, exterior building materials, etc. These types of restrictions are put in place by the developers to ensure a certain level of investment security for those interested in purchasing within the development. As you can see the impact and philosophy of preservation has far exceeded simply saving a historic building.

To further understand the draw and desirability our local historic districts create one can simply look to the sales records of the past year as well as the influx of new construction. Houses with in historic districts



are “flying off the shelf” many sell within a week and this with prices increasing. They are being sought out by income seeking buyers as well as by owner occupied buyers. Their worth is recognized by citizens from both this community as well as others and their value is increasing as we move into 2015. This value was further exemplified this past year when 3 new home owner occupied houses were built on vacant lots in Heritage Hill. This is unheard of, who wants to build in an inner city neighborhood let alone in a code restricted historic district? The answer is,

young couples, young families, singles and empty nesters. With these groups in mind we have also seen developers construct and seek to construct multi-use buildings in Heartside, Cherry Hill, Fairmount Square and Wealthy Historic Districts. Why is this? It’s because of the economic and physical value of the area and desirability of the neighborhoods all of which would not be present without Historic Preservation. The architecture, the walkability, the personability, the streetscapes, and overall sense of place, all combine to create a unique and desirable environment.



# Community Reach Out!!

Staff and the HPC in conjunction with neighborhood associations such as East Hills Council of Neighbors and Heritage Hill Association created and ran two free educational workshops in 2014.

In June the group hosted HISTORIC PRESERVATION 101 at the ICCF building on Cherry. The workshop was designed to dispense introductory level information regarding historic districts and what it means to live and own property in one. Speakers for the occasion were:

Rebecca Smith-Hoffman who discussed why we designate; Elizabeth Hoffman-Ransford who discussed what the future holds for historic preservation; and Rhonda Baker who covered the ins and outs of the guidelines, the permitting processes and available infor-

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION 101!**

**Historic Preservation Guidelines**

**JOIN US!!**

Own a property in a historic district or thinking of buying one?

This **FREE** workshop is a must attend!! It's a wonderful opportunity to learn about the regulations and benefits of historic districts.

- Learn the rules and fun of owning a property in a historic district.
- What makes your neighborhood historic district awesome!
- Meet City of Grand Rapids Historic Preservation Staff and the East Hills Council of Neighbors.

Snacks & Refreshments Provided

When: Monday, June 16th  
 Time: 6pm to 8pm  
 Where: ICCF--920 Cherry Street SE, Assembly Hall

HOSTED BY:

east hills  
 CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS



mational help. On a beautiful sunny Monday evening the workshop was well attended with over 35 eager participants. The presentation and subsequent discussions and questions from the attendees caused the event to exceed its 8pm end time by nearly an hour, a clear indication of the participation and interest of the audience.

In response to the turnout at the first event and community request for more we held a second workshop on December 8th; again at ICCF. This workshop was designed to address owners concerns regarding

The content of each workshop was created based on input from the associations and residents to determine the most desired topics.

weatherization and efficiency as it pertains to windows. The speakers for the event were well respected restoration professionals, Keven Doenier & John Leegwater of Midtown Craftsman. The pair volunteered their time and gave a wonderful presentation relating to all matters of window repair and weatherization. The event included a power point talk as well as several opportunities for the audience to get hands on with physical examples and samples. Again this event was well received with attendance exceeding 25 persons.

# Renovations and Restorations Abound!

40 Logan SW, Baker Lofts



Left, 609 Wealthy SE before and after, below



Not to be overshadowed by the impressive amount of new projects in the various historic districts; projects that focused on renovation and restoration of historic structures also thrived.

The number of applications being pulled for repairs and restoration of historic buildings is on the rise illustrating the care being given to our existing housing stock. Some projects have required years such as 333 Fountain, 28 Lafayette NE, 609 Wealthy, while others such as 413 Eastern, 978 Cherry and 40 Logan SW (Baker Lofts) seemed to happen overnight. All have had an important impact on their neighborhood and restored these beautiful architectural gems back to their former glory.



*Left, 28 Lafayette NE before and above, after*

*Below, 333 Fountain following renovation*





413 Eastern, before



413 Eastern, after



978 Cherry after



978 Cherry before



578 Madison

# Projects Completed!



959 Wealthy

This year the HPC approved several large new construction projects and several previously approved projects came to fruition. Of these projects three are owner occupied homes being constructed in Heritage Hill, two of which are now completed and the third is nearing the end of construction.

Although a few less cranes exist in the Heartside skyline with the completion of 240 Ionia SW this shall be a short lived scenario as future projects are gearing up in the wings for 2015-2016.



240 Ionia SW



Rendering of a future development at 921 Cherry SE

# Coming Soon!

Not to be out done by the two oldest districts, Heritage & Heartside, Cherry Hill, Fairmount Square and Wealthy Street are also seeing an increase in new construction which speaks volumes to the desirability of the area. Among the projects one can expect to see work begin on the new addition to the gas station at 701 Wealthy as it becomes the new home of Johnny B's. A new multi-story residential/commercial structure and addition will grace the skyline of the Cherry business corridor as 921 Cherry is erected on the vacant lot adjacent to "The Grove" and an addition is created to 200 Eastern.

Additionally, community involvement and conversations are underway on three other projects, both with the ability to add significant life to currently unutilized land in three historic districts.



Plan drawings of new constructins at 200 Eastern, above, and 701 Wealthy SE, below



# 2014 HPC Award Winners



Residential Projects – David, Isaac, John LaGrand for 556 Wealthy SE



Residential Projects – Lee Kitson Builder for 336 Visser SE



Commercial Projects – Mel Trotter Ministries for 47 Williams SW

before



after

Group Projects – Habitat for Humanity of Kent County for Wealthy Heights Projects

before



### Special Recognition



Tom Pfister



Wesley Beck

Group Projects – Tall Turf Ministries and MidTown Craftsmen for 816 Madison SE

after



Wealthy Street Bakery & Jeremiah32, LLC

# The Purpose of the HPC

1. Stabilize and improve property values in Historic Districts.
2. Strengthen the local economy.
3. Safeguard the Heritage of the City of Grand Rapids by preserving Historic Districts and Historic Landmarks that reflect elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history.
4. Foster civic beauty.

These purposes were successfully served during 2014 through 327 decisions made by staff and the Commission. These decisions preserved the integrity of the structures and district while at the same time enabling practical changes which allow for economic use of historic buildings. The significant amount of investment in improvement and renovation of many buildings in the historic districts speaks to the impact of historic preservation on economic development.

## HPC News

- Staff continues to partner with neighborhood associations & GRAR to create educational workshops
- Staff has joined the State Historic Preservation Review Board
- HPC bid fair well to long time Chair Barry VanDyke as well as Commissioners, Heather Edwards & Kevin Doenier.
- HPC welcomed Jenn Gavin and welcomed back Kerry Baldwin; both have been an asset to the Commission and have had very active first few months of service. Warm welcome to both!

## Statistical Information

### Approved Applications

- The ratio of approved applications remained steady at an outstanding 96%. In 2014 the HPC and HP Staff approved 313 applications at first hearing and four more at second hearing. The total approved applications reached 317 of the 327 received.

### Applications Processed

- In the year 2014 the HPC and staff reviewed a total of 327 applications a substantial number for the year. A further testament to the stability, investment security, and desirability of the historic districts and the customer service provided.

### HPC Reviewed Applications Per Historic District

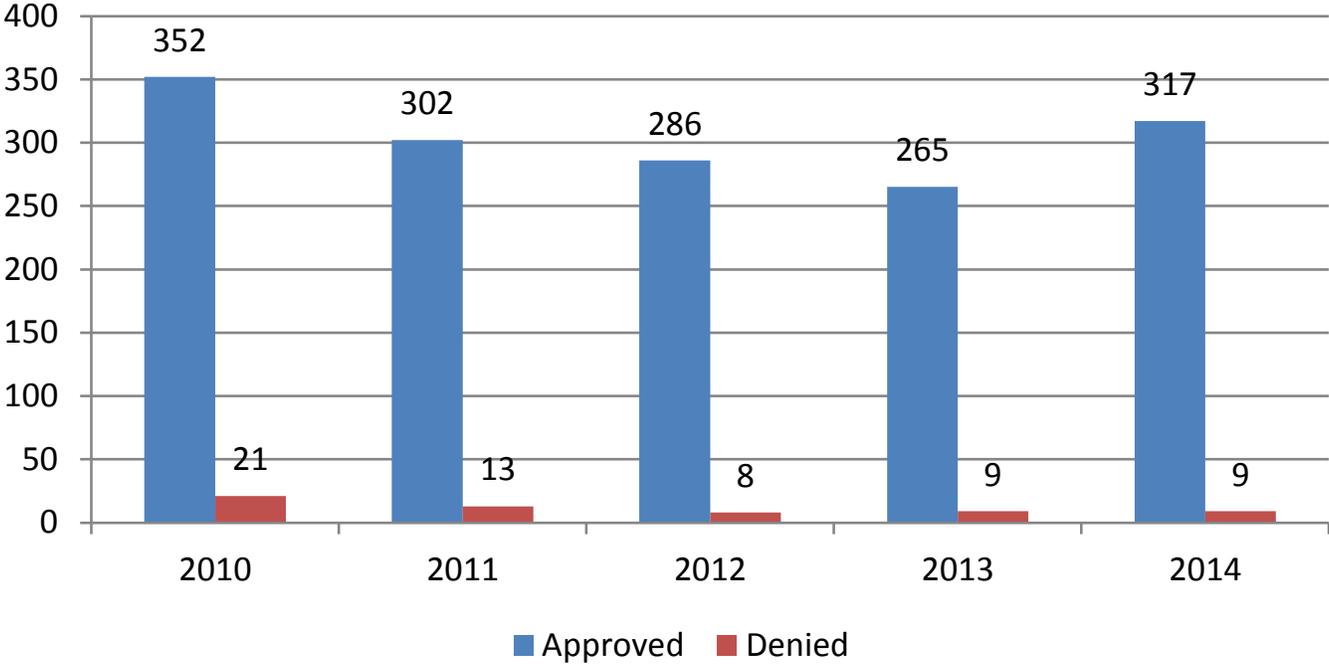
- Applications to the HPC from historic districts other than Heritage Hill climbed to a 41% of the activity over the year.

### Staff Approved Applications

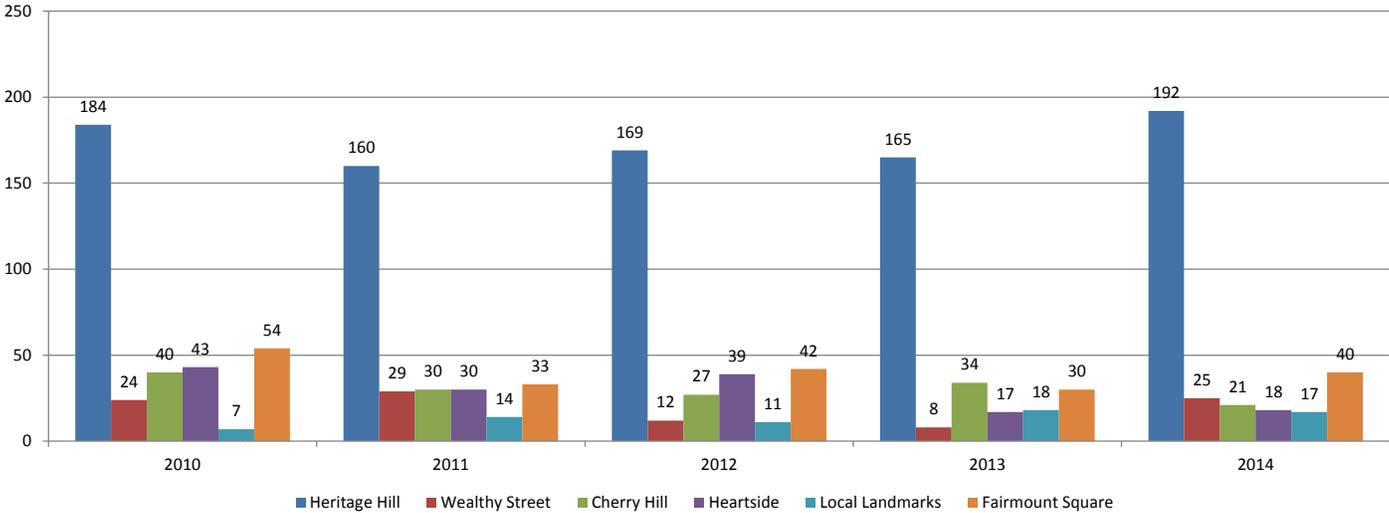
- Staff-approved applications are those that receive instant consideration and approval. Applicants utilize the one-stop convenience of the Development Center for review.

- A total of 1136 applications have been approved by staff over the past five years; 252 in 2015 alone.

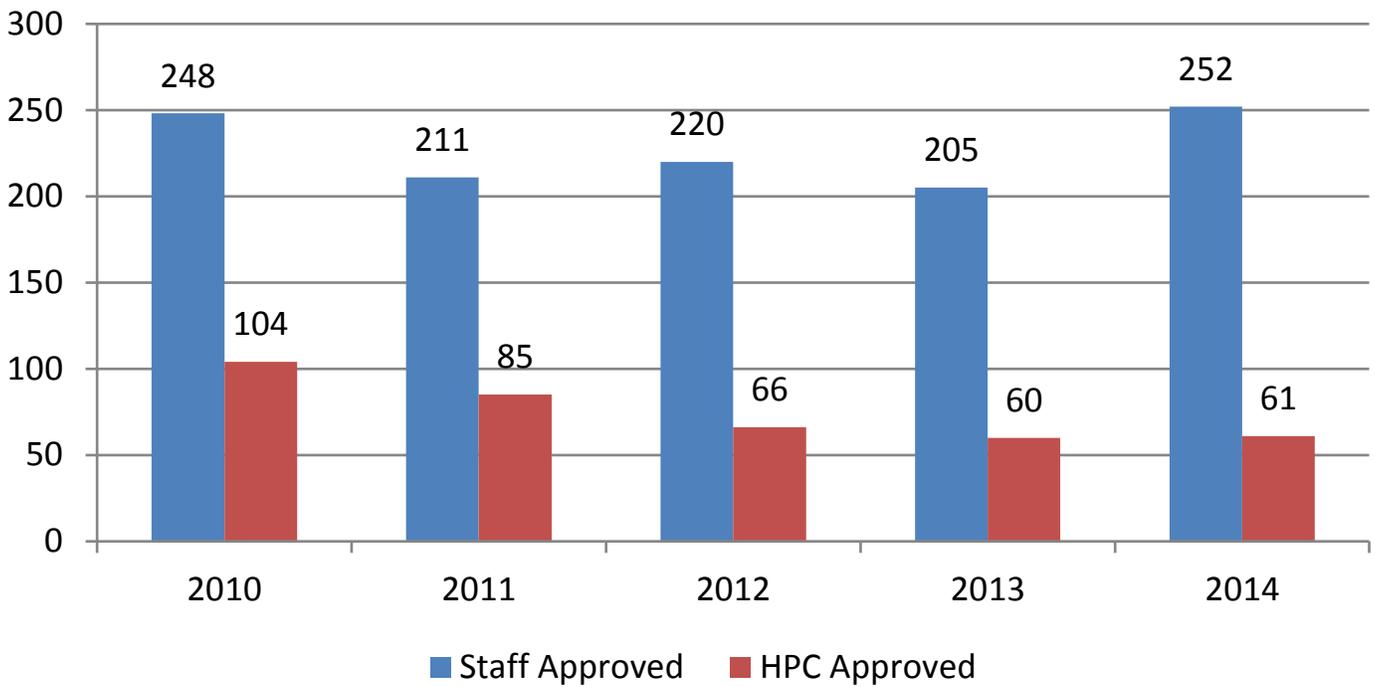
# Approved Applications



## Approved Applications Per Historic District



# Approved Applications Processed



## Customer Service Performance

