CH-UH BOE places 4.8 mill levy on November ballot

Kim Sergio Inglis

In an Aug. 10 letter to the Heights Observer, Ryan Routh, chair of the CH-UH City School District’s Lay Finance Committee, announced that the district’s board of education (BOE) “has placed a 4.8 mill levy on the November 2020 ballot.” In remarks at the July 7 BOE meeting, Routh stated that the “additional, two-year operating levy of 4.8 mills is the minimum amount needed to sufficiently cover the costs to operate the district.”

On Aug. 10 and 11, the district’s supervisor of communications, Cathan Cavanagh, confirmed that the BOE “is moving forward with a November levy.” She declined to provide further information until a press release was approved.

That press release, submitted to the Heights Observer the evening of Aug. 11, stated in part:

“The CH-UH BOE approved the second reading of the proposed 4.8-mill November 2020 additional operating levy language at its July 28 special meeting. At the direction of the board, the district treasurer filed the necessary paperwork with the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections and the levy is now slated to be on the November 2020 ballot.

“The decision to ask our community for a levy in November was not an easy one,” said CH-UH Board of Education President Jodi Sourini. “We understand that many Heights residents are facing economic instability right now. But after a levy failure earlier this year, a freeze in state funding, and the potential effect on by-mail voting, the League of Women Voters of Greater Cleveland (LWVC) urges all voters to act promptly in registering to vote (or checking their registration status), requesting a ballot, and returning it.

Online voter registration

Check your registration status at the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections (BOE) website (www.cuyahogacounty.org) and complete a registration form if you are not registered at your current address due to a move, you can register or update your registration online. You will need an Ohio driver’s license or Ohio-issued ID card. The online voter registration page on the Ohio Secretary of State (SOS) website (sos.ohio.gov) will guide you through the process.

If you do not have the required BMV-issued documents, print out and complete a registration form (available from the same SOS Web page) and mail it to: Cuyahoga County BOE, 2955 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115.

Under pandemic conditions, the safest way to exercise one’s right to vote in the Nov. 3 General Election is to register to vote online (deadline Oct. 5), and vote by mail (aka by absentee ballot). Given concerns about U.S. postal service delays and the potential effect on by-mail voting, the League of Women Voters of Greater Cleveland (LWVGC) urges all voters to act promptly in registering to vote (or checking their registration status), requesting a ballot, and returning it.

LWV provides voting and ballot info

Maryann Barnes

More than 1,000 Little Free Pantries are now open across the U.S., part of a grassroots project begun in 2016, by Jessica McClard in Arkansas, to respond to community food insecurity. In the Cleveland area, several Little Free Pantries are have opened.

“Our teens were looking for a way to give back to their community and respond to pressing local needs,” said Sarah Stone, pastor, and Lindsay Heron-Lewis, associate pastor, at the blessing of the Little Free Pantry at Fairmount Presbyterian Church.

Amy Kim Kryemes-Parks, director of spiritual formation, joins Jessica McClard, streetcorner pastor, and Lindsay Heron-Lewis, associate pastor, at the blessing of the Little Free Pantry at Fairmount Presbyterian Church.

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A little bit of this, a little bit of that

HELP ‘SAVE OUR STAGES’ NOW

To the Editor:

Ensemble Theatre, Greater Cleveland’s home for modern American classics, culturally relevant plays, and significant new works, has been producing great theater with local talent for 40 great years. Their doors have been closed to the public since March 1, and may continue to be for some time.

Like other arts, event, and theater organizations, Ensemble has faced, and continues to face, tens of thousands of dollars in losses due to the pandemic. There must be some type of industry-specific relief!

Please help us #SaveOurStages by contacting Ohio Sens. Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman at www.saveourstages.org. The site provides additional information and a pre-written text that you can use in place of, or in addition to, a personal message to let them know why it is essential to save Cleveland’s and Ohio’s stages. You will also find information on the bill being proposed to Congress.

Take action now.#SaveOurStages.

Celeste Cosentino
Executive Artistic Director, Ensemble Theatre

Appointments don’t reflect the voice of the people

To the Editor:

In last fall’s election, Cleveland Heights voters were clear that appointments don’t reflect the voice of the people. Residents rejected the most recent city council appointment by a large margin, with the challenger, Davida Russell, winning against the appointed council member, with more than 57 percent of the vote.

Just one year later, the council member rejected by the voters had somehow made it to city council’s top four applicants [for another open council seat], narrowed from a pool of 22.1mmm, really? How did this happen?

Our city may have some important issues on its plate, but there’s nothing that would inhibit the current council from fully functioning. It would serve the residents of Cleveland Heights more to wait until a seventh member can be democratically elected to council.


School levy should keep pace with inflation

To the Editor:

The CH-UH school board has placed a 4.8 mill levy on the November 2020 ballot. Voting for the levy makes financial sense for our community. CH-UH has placed a levy on the ballot simply to keep up with inflation. Due to Ohio law, even when the value of district homes rises, the amount of property tax collected is kept constant (estimated at around

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| Open the Observer | Bob Rosenbaum |

As you probably saw on page 1, the Heights Observer was recently named Ohio’s best non-daily community newspaper; and our “Heights of Democracy” column, by Deborah Van Klief and Carla Rantaugen, won the top award for public service journalism. The Press Club of Cleveland usually announces these awards at a banquet in June, preceded by the best cocktail party of the year (if you enjoy shop talk with journalists). This year, for the obvious reason, it was delayed and then held online. I watched it from my patio and alone. But that didn’t diminish the moment.

Our volunteer-based business model makes the Heights Observer an outlier in the awards program. Our volunteer editors will make sure that the Heights Observer would tell the community’s story as it unfolds over time. To me, this award is recognition from within the industry that we’re doing it pretty well—even with our unusual approach.

Being No. 1 in the state does not make us immune to the pandemic. With so many bars and restaurants operating on life support, and big gatherings canceled, our advertising revenue is down by about 50 percent since April. Even at that, we’re doing better than many other community publications.

I’m thankful to the advertisers who have stuck with us throughout, we’ll recognize them by name before the year ends. Meanwhile, we aren’t seeing any meaningful financial re-bound yet, and once it begins I expect it to be a long, slow climb back.

The Heights Observer is hovering right around break-even, so we can keep on going if things don’t get markedly worse. But the number of pages in each issue is determined in large part by ad revenue. As a result, we’ve been printing thinner papers and have less room for the many contributions we receive each month. Please keep the articles, columns and letters coming. But also know that we continue to publish under difficult circumstances. Your patience and kindness is always appreciated.

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Take action now.#SaveOurStages.

Celeste Cosentino
Executive Artistic Director, Ensemble Theatre

Why is Heights Librarians a landlord?

To the Editor:

I am a taxpayer of the district and always support local library tax requests, for two simple reasons:

• I am an ardentbeliever in the power of education and learning, and Heights Libraries does an excellent job of fulfilling its mission. It has recently come to my attention the CH-UH libraries are being asked to continue being a landlord for a group of nonprofit entities that are currently renting space in the former Coventry School building. Being a landlord and renting office space to nonprofits has nothing to do with the mission of the library and acts to defocus the library from its core mission.

There is plenty of unused office space in the Heights available to the current tenants. If the Board of Directors of Heights Libraries cannot find a programming use for the former Coventry School building that is in the wheelhouse of its mission, then I urge the board to demolish the building and convert the space to parking and a park.

James Hurley
Cleveland Heights

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Felicia Je Sofe, Thyra Davis, Asia Johnson, Markita Stevenson, Lonnie Davis, Florine Alford and William Jeffries.

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Developing Millikin land would be a tragic loss

Michael Morse

Imagine a mile-long wooded corridor giving the neighborhood a sense of serenity. Imagine destroying that natural area in order to build a few more houses in a city where vacant lots and vacant houses abound. Once destroyed it will never come back. Then, where will the children go to learn to love nature? Imagine saving this small piece of nature for yourselves, your children, your community.

Around the perimeter of Severance Town Center, there is a mile-long wooded buffer stretching east from South Taylor Road to Severance Millikin school, and then north to Mayfield Road. The core of this buffer is the 12-acre school campus, with acres of wooded land. I call this wooded land the Severance Woods. This is not vacant land. This is a gem we should cherish and preserve. If this were a public park, no one would dare suggest destroying a thousand trees to make room for more housing. No matter your age, many of these trees were old when you were young.

The city of Cleveland Heights wants to buy this land from the Cleveland Heights - University Heights City School District, and then sell it to a private developer so that these woods can be destroyed so that a few more houses can be built. In a world threatened by global warming, where people are desperately trying to restore nature, why would we allow this wooded area to be destroyed?

There is no shortage of vacant land in need of redevelopment. Severance Town Center is a vast opportunity for redevelopment. All over Cleveland Heights there are vacant lots and houses in need of redevelopment. There is no need to destroy the Severance Woods to find room for more housing.

Some people say the schools need more revenue from this land. But seriously, it is not reasonable to think that taxing a few houses in this small area would make any significant contribution to the vast financial problems our city and schools face.

We, the people of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights school district, are the real owners of this land. It belongs to us. It belongs to our children. It belongs to the future of our community.

Cleveland Heights is at risk of losing this gem. Please speak up and let people know what a tragic loss this would be.

Michael Morse is a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights.
Performance audit would make school district accountable

To the Editor:

What is wrong with accountability? What is wrong with asking how and why your tax dollars were spent in a particular fashion? Our school board has shown a complete lack of accountability toward how it spends our $130 million in taxes to run the school district. We have asked [board members] for over seven months to have a performance audit done in the district. A performance audit is done by a neutral third party from the state auditor’s office to see if there are any cuts or savings to our budget that can be made, to allow our tax money to be spent in the best way, and to get the most for our tax dollars.

Based solely on how hard the school board is fighting this, it seems [its members] don’t want to spend our tax dollars properly. They just want to continue wasting our tax dollars and then ask for more this November with another levy.

Other school districts have found millions of dollars in cost savings following their performance audits. I am certain that, following a performance audit here, we would have enough in savings to not require the levy they placed on the ballot.

John Vitale
Cleveland Heights

Jodi Sourini
Several residents have asked about the property transaction involving four parcels of land at the Delisle Center that the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Board of Education (BOE) recently sold to the city of University Heights. Since the community is interested, I’d like to explain the factors which led the BOE to this decision—many of which may not be readily apparent.

First, Ohio Revised Code (ORC) has specific rules regarding the disposition of public school properties, which are considered public assets. We must follow the law even though the law may not enable a school district to maximize potential revenue the way a city can.

Second, the Ohio Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) program permits municipalities and counties to designate CRAs which provide a direct incentive tax exemption for up to 15 years, depending on the construction project. Under this program, municipalities are empowered to grant these tax abatements.

Third, the four parcels the school district owned at the Delisle Center were not usable for educational purposes. This meant, in addition to being responsible for their upkeep, the district was required to pay taxes on them. The city of University Heights owned an additional three parcels. Because of the shape and location of the parcels, and the fact they were owned by two separate entities, they were unlikely to be usable or to be developed unless they were combined. Back to my first point: Under ORC, a city has more latitude to deal directly with individual developers. The school district paid the taxes on the four properties that we owned to settle our tax obligation before transferring the property. The city of University Heights picked up legal fees and other costs required to complete the transaction.

Fourth, the school board ensured the legal agreement includes a “claw back provision.” This ensures that if the development does not proceed as planned, the land reverts back to the school district.

Fifth, if the school district had continued to own this land that we deemed unusable for our needs, we would not gain any tax revenue from it (and we would have to continue to pay the upkeep and taxes). If the land were developed, even under a CRA, in the first 15 years, we’d receive modest tax revenue from the developer based on the parcel divisions and the initial improvements required to develop the land. Due to the CRA, the buildings themselves will be tax-abated for 15 years, which the school district has no authority to contest or approve. After 15 years, the district will receive taxes on both the land as well as the buildings, which should increase significantly based on the project’s anticipated value in 15 years.

Sixth, a new development, as is planned for this property, typically increases the value of its surrounding neighborhood, and often spurs additional economic growth. Revi talizing the Taylor corridor would bring positive benefits to the cities of University Heights and Cleveland Heights, as well as the school district.

After considering these factors, the BOE decided it was in the public’s best interest in the long term to proceed with selling the parcels so this project could move forward. If we didn’t, we were unlikely to ever receive revenue from this land, and it would continue to cost the district money.

As with all construction projects, the district will include the projected tax revenue for this project in its Five-Year Forecast, once ground is broken on the project. Many proposed real estate developments are delayed, or never built, for a variety of reasons. It would be inappropriate to forecast tax receipts before we have evidence they are likely to materialize.

Jodi Sourini is president of the Board of Education for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District. She’s been a resident of University Heights for more than 25 years.
Letters continued from page 4

Catherine P. Sullivan and Julie Mokotoff need. We feel this is urgent, and we places with trained professionals who stress, we want our schools to remain larly in this moment of unprecedented school levy in order to protect these residents to support the upcoming board, we urge our fellow Heights our mental health system across the country’s children—some -ance counselors and psychologists play a misguided, but dangerous. We firmly believe that school social workers, guid -rants, is it a coincidence that Monticello, the name of a slave farm, is a main road that defines how we live and how we learn? My guess is, many will feel over -whelmed by this call to action. Many who have stood with Black lives may say, “This is too much,” or “This is going too fast.” But if our schools and streets were named after Nazi camps, would we not want to stand up against what many of us can argue has been a slow genocide of a race? In this paradigm there is only one side, and it is my hope that we can all stand together and say: “It is time for a major change.”

Change the name of our school. Change the name of our street. We will no longer honor a slave farm as part of our institutions and our community. [To receive a version of this opin -ion from the writer, containing editor -ial resources from Monticello.org and Smithsonian Magazine, send an e-mail to the writer at info@bellacpservices.com.]

Alisa Bray is a mother, community and dis -trict volunteer, an activist, and local business owner.

Letters continue on page 9

Remove Monticello name from CH school and street

Alisa Bray

Equity is a topic that has been a part of critical attempts for change in our CH-UH school district for at least four years now. As a community, we created waves when we brought to the district’s attention the injustices at Oxford El -ementary School, and the movement has picked up momentum since. For those of us who can see the clear lines in our cities, due to demo -graphics and long-standing prejudices, issues of equity do not end with our schools. As recent developments regarding Black lives pick up speed, much has come to light about the history of our country. It has been whitewashed, and I cannot ask for forgiveness for these words that make us cringe, but regret -tably are true. It was recently brought to my at -ten -tion by my son’s uncle, Pastor Stanley Manning of Christ Centered Church, that Monticello, a plantation owned by Thomas Jefferson, was nothing short of a slave farm. I had to ask myself, how could someone who considered property end up glorified, with streets and schools named after him? We know that answer, though it was under the guise of being one of our “founding fathers.”

When we look up the history of Jefferson, he is constantly written as a hero and a leader. But can generations who have been greatly impacted by systemic racism, with the root being the slave trade and colonizing of in -digestious lands, really hold and honor such a person as a hero? We are at the point where we understand that the plight of the brown person in America is far reaching, affecting us within each institution, ranging from our laws, the tissue of our cities and where we can live, our education, and even our health care.

The idea that change must take place is easy as a conversation, but often meets resistance when a call to action requests real change and commitment. Many fold.

I am calling to action a change in our city and our schools: to remove the name of Monticello from our streets and from where our students gather to learn. I will push alone, if neces -sary—but imagine if, as a collective, we can come together and understand the urgent need to accept the truth of our history and the impact it has on many today. This is a call to action to respect the lives of those who have not had the right to be born with certain privileges; a call to action to no longer honor those who participated in the legal theft and downfall of a people, of a culture.

When we look at the lines in Clev -eland Heights, and see where resources are lacking, is it a coincidence that Monticello, the name of a slave farm, is a main road that defines how we live and how we learn? My guess is, many will feel over -whelmed by this call to action. Many who have stood with Black lives may say, “This is too much,” or “This is going too fast.” But if our schools and streets were named after Nazi camps, would we not want to stand up against what many of us can argue has been a slow genocide of a race? In this paradigm there is only one side, and it is my hope that we can all stand together and say: “It is time for a major change.”

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School levy will ensure student mental health services

To the Editor:
As a board-certified psychoanalyst, and a licensed clinical counselor, re -spectively, we have both worked with children, teens and adults experienc -ing mental health crises. Sometimes these crises arise from an acute trauma, such as a sudden death or unexpected divorce, and sometimes they come about over time from the ceaseless burden of daily living.

The CDC estimates that approxi -mately 4.4 million children ages 3-17 suffer from depression, and approximately 1.9 million suffer from depression. We know, without question, that these and other mental conditions are being amplified by the COVID pandemic. These issues often remain invisible to the untrained eye, and can easily go undiagnosed and untreated. For many young people in our community, their crises are first spotted by concerned teachers, coaches, school counselors and social workers.

We both are also parents of stu -dents in CH-UH schools, and we are grateful that our district’s schools do such a good job providing social and mental health services to students. Un -fortunately, we frequently hear people claim that the number of social sup -port staff our district hires is too many. We think those complaints are not only misguided, but dangerous. We firmly believe that school social workers, guid -ance counselors and psychologists play a critical role in the health and well-being of our community’s children—some -times a life or death role.

At a time when we need to bolster our mental health system across the board, we urge our fellow Heights residents to support the upcoming school levy in order to protect these vital services in our district. Particu -larly in this moment of unprecedented stress, we want our schools to remain places with trained professionals who are ready to serve children in great need. We feel this is urgent, and we hope you will join us in voting for the school levy in November.

Catherine P. Sullivan and Julie Mokotoff
Cleveland Heights

Removal of Monticello name from CH school and street

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Black education matters

Sheryl Banks and Eve McPherson

It has been heartening to see so many Black Lives Matter signs in Heights yards, and to see our neighbors and friends show up for justice at rallies, protests and workshops.

It shouldn’t surprise anyone. We pride ourselves on being a diverse community that supports social activism. But, are we really doing all we can as a community to support racial justice and combat systemic racism?

Would it surprise you to know that white families opt out of CH-UH schools at a rate of 85 percent—a rate significantly higher than many surrounding suburbs? Would it surprise you to know that EdChoice defunds primarily minority schools, and that CH-UH is defunded by millions of dollars every year? Would it surprise you to know that over 93 percent of the students who use vouchers never attended our public schools?

So, as we decorate our lawns with messages of support for our Black neighbors, are we, as white neighbors, really doing what we can and should be doing to fight for racial justice and equity in our own community? Voters recently defeated a school levy [in spring 2020]. That levy was on the ballot solely because of EdChoice vouchers defunding the schools—vouchers which primarily support our white residents, not our Black ones.

To address systemic racism, we must support the institutions that support our Black neighbors. The public schools are at the heart of this support. The majority of children who attend CH-UH schools are Black.

As white community members, we should make sure the schools are integrated. We cannot self-segregate and expect to achieve a more equitable and just community. Separate schools have never been equal. Dr. King wrote about these same exact problems more than 50 years ago, in Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community? Be a part of the solution. Send your children to our excellent public schools.

Most importantly, support our public schools, and the children who attend them, by voting for the levy this November. If you believe that Black lives matter, you must also believe that CH-UH students, the majority of whom are Black, deserve to continue to have an excellent, free public education available to them. Don’t take it away.

Sheryl Banks is a Cleveland Heights resident, and parent of a Heights High freshman. Eve McPherson is a Cleveland Heights resident, parent of a Heights High freshman and a Roxboro Middle School student, and an alumna of CH-UH schools.

CH City Council must demand access to police policy materials

Josephine Moore

At the July 20 Cleveland Heights City Council meeting, there was a discussion between City Manager Tanisha Briley and Council Member Kahlil Seren that should worry any Cleveland Heights citizen who thinks that our elected officials need to be, at minimum, privy to all decisions about governmental policy in our city.

After Police Chief Annette Mecklenburg’s report to council, Seren referenced ongoing work with the firm Lexipol, for the purpose of crafting our police department’s policies. Seren asked whether, as the policymaking authority for the city, council would be able to see the materials Lexipol is providing to our police department. He then made a request that council have access to those materials.

I thought this seemed perfectly reasonable. City council members are, after all (for the time being), our only directly elected and accountable government officials, and they are indeed ultimately responsible for overseeing policy for all city matters.

Furthermore, protests are still happening across our nation. Organizations right here in Cleveland Heights, such as Safer Heights, are demanding greater accountability from our police forces, and demanding that we give community representatives a seat at the table when deciding how we define and create public safety. To shut down transparency and community dialogue now would invite suspicion and unrest. Surely, we can all agree that we don’t want that.

Yet the city manager said giving city council members the opportunity to review the materials Lexipol is providing to our police department, so as to guide us in shaping our policies, would be inappropriate. She said that it is not under city council’s authority to have a say in how these policies are shaped.

I—and many others—disagree. Being able to review materials that may impact the public safety of our city is not reserved for the administration alone. But more than that, now is not the time to prohibit our directly elected officials from ensuring that our police department’s policies reflect our city’s goals, values, and community needs.

Please call on our city council members to stand united in demanding access to see all materials being used to shape our police department’s policies. We elected our city council members to be our leaders, to be responsible, and to put our community’s interests over political turf wars.

Josephine Moore is a proud Cleveland Heights resident, mother, wife, and small-business owner.
Privatizing local government

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg

Cleveland Heights Chief of Police Annette Mecklenburg’s response to the concerns of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the local group Safer Heights, is laudable and welcome. She announced this summer that her department would review and update its policies, with particular attention to use-of-force, and bias-free policing.

We are concerned, however, that City Manager Tanisha Briley has outsourced this admittedly time-consuming job to Lexipol, a California-based company serving 460 Ohio municipalities and 3,400 agencies nationally. Lexipol provides “model policies” and assistance in customizing them. Clients can also subscribe to daily two-minute training modules on the practical application of those policies.

Lexipol’s pitch to prospective clients (mainly smaller police and sheriffs’ departments) is protection from liability. This approach might theoretically lead to more temperate behavior on the part of individual officers: if you don’t kill someone, their family won’t sue you and your department over their death. But it does nothing to address the culture of policing, let alone dress the culture of policing, let alone address the culture of policing, let alone address the culture of policing, let alone address the culture of policing, let alone.

We spoke with Mecklenburg, who assured us, “We will be looking for questions about the role of police in a civic society.” What’s a Riversider? We are concerned, however, that what’s a Riversider? We are concerned, however, that Riverside and its subsidiaries are sucking up a lot of tax dollars and influencing, if not controlling, the delivery of some of our most essential government services.

Privatization is creeping into the lives of Heights children as well. The city recently engaged an outside company to hire and manage crossing guards. In addition, the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District, which some years ago privatized after-school care, has outsourced its human resources department to Renhill, a for-profit company that recently merged with California-based HR On Demand. They are now in charge of recruiting our children’s teachers.

As we have said before, sometimes it is practical, necessary and wise to bring in consultants. Two excellent examples are available on the Cleveland Heights YouTube channel. The July 15 meeting of city council’s Municipal Services Committee features detailed, informative presentations on a pair of vital issues. Council members and city staff heard first from an engineer from Wade Trim and an attorney from McMahon DeGulis about compliance with the consent decree regarding our sewers. Their technical expertise and long experience with the EPA are indispensable to Cleveland Heights.

Next came a presentation from GT Environmental on the proposed change to automated trash pickup. It validated the conclusions of the resident Refuse and Recycling Task Force, but recommended higher fees as more realistic.

Well-qualified experts with narrowly defined specialties and local knowledge can provide invaluable assistance to cities and schools. This is very different from the offerings of corporate behemoths that profit by taking over core municipal or public education functions.

It’s important to know the difference. What will we choose to be: Riversiders or citizens?

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

Susan Kasner

John Lewis, the heroic advocate of nonviolence, beseeched us: “When you see something that is not right, you must say something.”

If you read this column regularly, you know I have not been silent about EdChoice vouchers, a state program that requires public school districts to pay for private-school vouchers out of the school district’s state funding. They are particularly damaging to the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District, which transfers more than 30 percent of its state aid to voucher holders, the highest proportion in the state. It is this huge expense that led the school board to cut the district budget by $2 million this year and, next, to put a levy on the ballot in November.

During my stay at home, I documented how other school districts are affected by this program, which, rather than investing in public-school students, uses test scores to rate school quality, makes vouchers available to families served by a school that is rated as failing, and requires the so-called failing district to pay for the vouchers.

A close look at who is harmed most by the loss of public education funds to vouchers shows that EdChoice discriminates by income and race. Public officials built a project to advance private education on the backs of poor and minority children. If we are serious about dismantling the effects of institutional racism, we must end EdChoice.

Through the 2018-19 school year, only 40, or 6 percent, of Ohio’s 612 school districts had any schools eligible for EdChoice. For 2019-20, EdChoice expanded into 100 more districts, but 94 percent of all vouchers awarded that year were in the 40 previously included districts. Twenty-two districts have voucher expenses above $500,000 in CH-UH, the cost is more than $7 million.

When I looked at who attends school in the hardest-hit districts, I discovered that most students in 39 of the 40 districts live in poverty, and, in 29, most are racial minorities. The 22 districts, each funded 100 or more EdChoice vouchers account for 90 percent of EdChoice vouchers statewide. All 22 districts have student poverty rates in excess of 44 percent, and, in 16, more than 80 percent of students live in poverty. Non-white students are the majority in 20 of those districts, and account for 87 percent of all the students enrolled in these city and first-ring districts.

The outsized power of rural legislators in a gerrymandered legislature, it’s no wonder it’s nearly impossible to solve this injustice.

Poor children are carrying the burden because the state uses test scores to define quality. Standardized tests, while convenient, are a more reliable measure of the income, parental education and neighborhood characteristics of test-takers than of what happens in school. By using test scores for this high-stakes decision, the legislators created a system that discriminates against poor children.

It is not surprising that most students in these districts are minorities. Income inequality is an enduring effect of institutional racism. As Nikole Hannah-Jones reported recently in The New York Times, the median income of African-American households is about half that of white households. Housing segregation by race and income plays into the lack of diversity in the districts most affected by vouchers. Local taxpayers foot the bill for the legislature’s addiction to funding private education at the expense of public schools.

The loss of funds to EdChoice leaves local officials with the unenviable choice of reducing educational opportunities or raising property taxes. Both exacerbate educational inequality among public schools in Ohio. It is time to dismantle this source of institutionalized inequality and the injustice it perpetuates.

Susan Kasner 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.
LETTERS continued from page 3 

Parent volunteers urge support of school levy

To the Editor:

We would like to introduce ourselves to the public: We are Tiger Nation for Strong Schools, a group of district parents and community volunteers campaigning for the .48 mill operat-
ing levy on the November ballot.

Formerly known as Citizens for Our Heights Schools, we opted to change our name after the anti-levy campaign co-opted “Tiger Nation,” descriptively implying they do not send their children to public schools, do not volunteer their time within district buildings, and do not identify themselves in any way with Tiger Nation. They were instead try-
ing to intentionally mislead and con-
fuse the public; something they were unfortu-
nately successful in doing. We are the ones truly believe in the students, families, teachers and staff that make up our fine public-school district, and who

needed to educate our children in what-
ever environments we find ourselves in throughout the coming school year.” The .48-mill levy would cost a homeowner approximately $168 a year, or $4.64 a month, per $100,000 in home-

value.

According to Cuyahoga County data on levy impacts and school funding, the annual tax bill per $100,000 of as-

sessed value is $1,275.65 for homeowners in Cleveland Heights, and $2,575.91 for those in University Heights. County data indicates that about 60 percent of the population resides in Cleveland Heights, that works out to $2,548 per $100,000 of assessed valuation (72.8 mills); for University Heights, it’s $2,566 per $100,000 of assessed valuation (72.8 mills).

The press release cited “devastating financial losses,” stating, “Due to new EdChoice voucher legislation signed into law in March of 2020, the district anticipated losing a minimum of an additional $17.6 million this fiscal year, bringing the total estimated EdChoice-related loss to at least $9.2 million. The district had previously expected, and budgeted for, a $5.7 million loss.”

“With a 2020 position in April 2020 and made significant cuts in each depart-

ment’s budget—nearly $2.1 million in

will work to ensure it has the fund-

ing necessary to do the vital work of educating our community’s children.

While our current board of edu-
cation and administration should be applauded for the difficult budget cuts they’ve enacted, we do not believe that education is a for-profit industry where the bottom line trumps all. Ef-

ciciency is not, and cannot and should not be, the guiding principle when creating a school district’s budget.

Instead of only looking at what a district cuts, how about looking at what a district offers—at its wide range of valuable programming—from advanced English as a Second Language, from sports to arts and music, from equitable social supports to Career Technical Educa-

tion?”

Levy continued from page 1

butter, jelly, cereal, soup, pasta, rice, and healthy snacks), toiletries, first-

aid items, paper goods, and small toys (Play-Doh and other items). If the pantry is full, donated items can be left in the Rubbermaid container near the church, by the entrance of the church’s east parking lot on Scarborough Road. More information about Little Free Pantries is available at: www.
littlefreepantries.org.

Sarah Stone is a Cleveland Heights resident and an autho-

rion. She is published as a non-profit project.

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Housing prices are up in UH

Mike Cook

Despite the pandemic, the University Heights housing market remains strong. The median housing price in the city made a significant jump in the second quarter of 2020, compared to both the first quarter of 2020, and the comparable second quarter of 2019.

The overall median sale price in University Heights increased by approximately $30,000 between the first and second quarter of 2020. In the city’s central census tract, the median price increased by roughly $50,000 in the second quarter.

While there were fewer sales in the second quarter of 2020 than in the second quarter of 2019, median prices across University Heights have increased by around $20,000 citywide. Each of the city’s four census tracts have seen increases.

“University Heights is back on the map, and people see our city as an exciting place to live, work, and raise a family,” Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan said. “Thanks to our Community Reinvestment Area, people are buying and making their homes here.”

Mike Cook is the communications and civic engagement coordinator for University Heights.
UH kids lobby Tribe to ‘Let Cooper In’

The kids of University Heights are making their voices heard. Will the Cleveland Indians listen?

Cooper the Chicken, the city’s brand ambassador (please don’t call him a mascot), usually spends his summer at Indians Park, in the stands, at the classroom and on the baseball league field. When the coronavirus pandemic ended all of the activities Cooper loves so much. So, when the City of University Heights announced its cardboard-cutout program, University Heights employees chipped in $100 so that Cooper could be represented at the baseball games. 

Unfortunately, the Tribe responded to the city’s request by saying it was “only printing cutouts of the human variety at this time.”

Seeing an opening in the “at this time” language, a Change.org petition was launched on Aug. 5, asking the Indians to reconsider and “Let Cooper In.”

The city has created a 60-second campaign commercial, featuring Cooper and kids in University Heights.

“University Heights, the time is now,” insists the announcer in the commercial. “Cooper needs to be at the games, representing all of us fans here in University Heights.”

The Indians and the city of University Heights have a proud tradition of working together. When Josephine Morhard created the first-ever youth baseball league in 1937, right here in University Heights, the Cleveland Indians provided uniforms and other assistance. Indians pitcher Mel Harder, a University Heights resident, was active with the league.

The commercial depicts Cooper’s room, which features a copy of the book Mrs. Morhard and the Boys, and a photo of Harder. Cooper’s nightstand displays a photo of him with his friend Gabriella Kreuz, the in-game host for the Indians. Other Indians memorabilia includes a chair from Cleveland Municipal Stadium, a Jim Thome bobblehead, and autographed photos of Rocky Colavito, Sandy Alomar, Tito Francona, Bob Feller and Lou Boudreau.

The commercial is posted on the University Heights Facebook, YouTube and Twitter accounts.

Mike Cook is the communications and civic engagement coordinator for University Heights.
**City council appointments hurt democracy**

To the Editor:

Cleveland Heights residents overwhelmingly supported Issue 26 [on the November 2019 ballot] because it was a vote for change—a change that gave residents the ability to vote for mayor. We supported Issue 26 because we wanted more transparency, accountability, and say in who runs our city by democratically electing our representatives, instead of relying on city council appointments. After 100 years without having an elected mayor accountable to residents, Issue 26 was a vote for change that residents wanted.

More appointments to Cleveland Heights City Council would be a step in the wrong direction. Appointments undermine democracy and allow people to appoint their friends and allies, opening the door for potential corruption, bribery and favoritism.

City council should heed the residents’ vote for a more democratic city by leaving the current council appointment decision to a vote by residents. With 22 [original] applicants for the open seat, we clearly have a lot of residents interested in serving. City council has already narrowed its selection down to four candidates—who’s to say whether qualified applicants haven’t already been ruled out or overlooked? All applicants interested in the position should get to know the residents, and let residents pick the best candidate in a fair and democratic election.

AnnDenise Lewis Nash
Cleveland Heights

**Another epidemic: elected officials interfering with free elections**

To the Editor:

In [the] November 2019 election, some CH City Council members created a $105,000 conflict PAC against the citizens’ Elected Mayor or charter change referendum. The city manager’s trade union donates $50,000 to defeat the ballot issue. March 2020 election: CH-UH school district illegally spends $14,675 of taxpayer funds as an in-kind donation for the campaign committee’s voter survey, then lies about it to the state auditor. The school board president and vice president are on the campaign’s steering committee, with their school board titles prominently displayed. The vice president held the campaign kick-off fundraiser at his home before the issue was even on the ballot. A school board member partook in the plantation sabotage, the Vote No Campaign kick-off fundraiser at the New Heights Grille.

2019: Columbus legislators wet their beaks as they run First Energy’s $60-million campaign to defeat a petition campaign to repeal HB 6. They bribed petitioners to quit.


Garry Kanter
Cleveland Heights

**FH to unveil Cedar Lee Mini-Park design**

Deanna Brenner Fisher

FutureHeights, the community development corporation for Cleveland Heights, is working on a redesign of the Cedar Lee Mini-Park, a 7,500-square-foot, city-owned site located between Boss Dog Brewing Company and Heights Arts in the Cedar Lee Business District. At 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 9, FutureHeights will share the new design at a Virtual Open House. Register to attend the Virtual Open House at http://bit.ly/CedarLeePark.

The design is the result of more than two years of civic engagement with community members and stakeholders, to remake this underutilized area into a vibrant public space that is attractive, welcoming, and offers opportunities to gather and host public programs. Through surveying, visioning, design sessions, and in-person interviews, a FutureHeights-led steering committee sought to understand the community’s desires and aspirations for the site. In fall 2019, through an RFP process, the group selected landscape architecture firm MKSK Studios, of Columbus, Ohio, to illustrate the community’s vision.

While working on a complete redesign, FutureHeights has led several city-wide improvements to the site. Last summer, artist and botanist Tony Cuda added a colorful deer motif to the mural via smartphone technology. This summer, Masaveug worked with some of the same students to refresh the plantings and maintain the site. In June, he added a colorful deer motif to the mural, and signage to explain how to access the interactive feature.

The site now also features café tables and chairs, funded through donations to the FutureHeights Cedar Lee Mini-Park Fund, and a Little Free Library, funded by Heights Libraries. The mini-park site was created when the city of Cleveland Heights vacated a portion of Cedarbrook Road in the 1960s, as the parking lot was being constructed, creating a pedestrian walkway from the lot to the businesses on Lee Road. FutureHeights began gathering community input on the future use of the space following a study of the business district it commissioned in 2016.

FutureHeights has raised a portion of the funds that will be needed to implement the new design, including funding from the city’s CDBG program and Cuyahoga County. Learn more about the project by visiting www.futureheights.org/programs/cedar-lee-mini-park.

Deanna Brenner Fisher is executive director of FutureHeights and publisher of the Heights Observer.
FutureHeights mini-grants deadline approaches

Mark Rodney, one of the leaders of the Boulevard Learning Garden, a 2019 FutureHeights Neighborhood Mini-Grant recipient.

Tuesday, Sept. 15, is the deadline for applicants to the FutureHeights Neighborhood Mini-Grants Program. The program, which began in the fall of 2015, provides funding of up to $5,000 to grassroots or neighborhood groups in Cleveland Heights who have creative solutions, projects, and programs that build on and enhance existing assets in their neighborhoods.

To date, the Neighborhood Mini-Grants Program has provided a total of $77,401 to 42 projects in Cleveland Heights.

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

For more information, e-mail FutureHeights at sbasu@futureheights.org. Learn about the projects funded to date, and download an application at www.futureheights.org/programs/community-building-program. Applications are due by 5 p.m. on Sept. 15.

FutureHeights also offers a Neighborhood Leadership Workshop Series. Since 2015, 77 Cleveland Heights residents have completed the program. Some participate because they are interested in learning more about the city, or want to meet their neighbors and other civically minded people. Others have a specific neighborhood project they want to complete. Many program graduates go on to join nonprofit boards, or city committees or commissions. Some apply to receive funding for a project through the FutureHeights Neighborhood Mini-Grants Program, which has biannual deadlines.

“I found the workshops to be extremely helpful in giving me a space to work out ideas I had, and shape them with the help of others with similar interest in working for Cleveland Heights,” said Michael Hagesfeld, a 2018 participant. “The speakers were interesting, and helped give different perspectives I could apply to my particular situation. Working with other people who also had a drive and love for Cleveland Heights inspired me, in addition to giving me ideas I could apply to my concept, and also be able to help them with theirs.”

Donna Johnson, a 2019 participant, said that participating in the program was “the perfect impetus to help me rally and engage my neighbors!”

The program takes an assets-based community-development approach, which means that it seeks to build upon a neighborhood’s strengths. It is funded by the city of Cleveland Heights through a Community Development Block Grant, and by individual contributions to FutureHeights.

Topics are: Individual Leadership; Asset Based Community Development; Planning Your Project; Policy & Advocacy; Learning the History of Cleveland Heights and Your Neighborhood; Leveraging Community Resources; and Building Community.

All Cleveland Heights residents are encouraged to apply to participate. Free childcare is available during sessions.

Traditionally, this program is held at the beginning of the year, starting in January and concluding in March.

However, with continued uncertainty regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, FutureHeights plans to hold its 2021 series in the fall, beginning in September and concluding in November.

“The cohort’s relationship-building experience is a key highlight reported by participants every year. By postponing the program’s start in 2021, we hope that we will be able to have in-person meetings,” said Deanna Bremer Fisher, executive director of FutureHeights. In 2022, we hope to get back to our regular spring schedule.”

For more information and a program application, email sbasu@futureheights.org. Program dates will be posted on the FutureHeights website and social media.

Suniti Basi is the director of community-building programs at FutureHeights.

CH Office on Aging news

Amy Jenkins

The staff of the Cleveland Heights Office on Aging is continuing its work, providing services while the Cleveland Heights Community Center and Senior Activity Center (SACC) remain closed.

This summer, the community center’s parking lot has been a site for yoga, line dance and tai chi classes, as well as lunches and concerts. Online, the office has offered exercise classes through Facebook Live, and some groups have found ways to meet safely using a variety of platforms, with and without the help of technology.

Meanwhile, social work outreach and nutrition support remain a focus. If you are a Cleveland Heights senior who needs help preparing and obtaining food, we have options available. Affordable home-delivered meals can be arranged, and boxes of shelf-stable food and food pantry items can be delivered to your door. We also have masks, and household and cleaning products available by request.

What’s next? Staff hopes to safely bring back some of our transportation services, add a few more classes and events, and find opportunities and new ways to help the office can safely reopen.

All of the programming developed during the time of coronavirus is designed to support seniors who may feel isolated, and to maintain a connection to the SAC community.

If you are a Cleveland Heights resident, age 60 and older, who needs services or has questions, contact the Office on Aging by phone (216-691-7377) or e-mail (ajenkins@clvhts.com).

Amy Jenkins is the supervisor of the Cleveland Heights Office on Aging and the CH Senior Activity Center.
CH council member hosts listening session

Sruti Basu

CH Council Member Davida Russell continues to learn from the community through her series of listening sessions, “You Talk - I Listen.”

Russell has scheduled the next community conversation for Sept. 19, 10-11:30 a.m., at the Front Stage Multiplex, formerly the Regal Movie Theatre at Severance Town Center, 3492 Mayfield Road.

The program will be facilitated by former news reporter Ohie Shelton, and Barbara Danforth Shelton. This will be an in-person event with plenty of room for social distancing; masks are required. The theater holds 210 people, but only 75 will be admitted.

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

Cleveland Heights City Council

Meeting highlights

JULY 20, 2020

Council members present were Mayor Jason Stein, Vice Mayor Kahil Seren, Mary Dunbar, Melody Joy Hart and Michael Ungar. Davida Russell was absent. Also present were City Manager Tanisha Briley, Clerk of Council Amy Himmelman, and Law Director William Hanna. The meeting lasted one hour and 11 minutes. It can be viewed on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbeoCAwNCZg.

Public comments

Six individuals sent messages with concerns about the 3G cell equipment, requesting more discussion and protection of health and safety.

Actions requested by city manager

Council granted approval to 1) issue a request for proposals for an affordability analysis for the Integrated Overflow Control Master Plan and, 2) enter into a letter of intent with the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District regarding the Milbrink School property.

Objection to liquor permits

Council passed a resolution objecting to the renewal of current liquor permits issued by the Ohio Department of Commerce, Division of Liquor Control in East Cleveland, doing business as City & East Hookah Bar, 2781 Euclid Heights Blvd. The resolution requests a hearing in a Cuyahoga County court. The objection is based on an overworking number of calls for compliance reports, including a shooting, at this establishment.

Charter amendment

On first reading council approved placing an amendment to the city charter on the November ballot related to the passage of Issue 26 last November, establishing an elected mayor. The amendment establishes the timeline for candidate qualifications. Also, the words “A mayoral election” will replace “The mayoral election,” referring to a primary election for mayor to be held on the second Tuesday following the first Monday in September.

Police report

Police Chief Annette Mclzuberg presented highlights of police activities. Full reports and news can be accessed on the city’s website. Progressive discipline, sexual-assault, and domestic-violence policies have been updated. Community feedback and questions are welcome. Through the Ohio Attorney General’s Office and by Aug. 1, officers will complete online training on de-escalation and dealing with the mentally ill. Police are beginning to collaborate with other city departments to handle some calls, and exploring regional resource sharing. Crime statistics have declined 21 percent for violent crime, and 22 percent for property crime.

City manager resigns

City Manager Briley announced her resignation, effective Sept. 1. After seven years in her current position, she will become city manager of Gahanna, Ohio. She thanked council and residents for the opportunity to serve, and said that working in Cleveland Heights has been an honor and a privilege. She is working with staff on the transition, calling them “a most capable and excellent staff.”

She praised Susanna Niemann O’Neil’s unmatched spirit, grit, and commitment and thanked her for stepping up to serve again after giving so much, continuing the great work of managing the city.

[City Council approved Niemann O’Neil as acting city manager.]

City manager’s report

The full report may be accessed on the city’s website.

Some items include:

• Cleveland Heights zip codes are a coronavirus “hot spot” for spread. There is a mask mandate, and a hotline to report mask-wearing issues.
• The city is working with merchants, and all parking meters and garages are free.
• Shredding day was a hit and will be done again on Saturday, Oct. 17, 9 a.m. to noon.
• The First Suburbs Housing Committee is working on an eviction help program and rent help is available through CHN Housing Partners (https://chnhousingpartners.org/rentalassistance/).
• The Parks and Recreation Department is working on virtual and in-person programming, including drive-in movies and parking lot concerts.
• A second COVID testing event is being planned with MatroHealth, with the date to be announced.

Council member comments

Mayor Stein announced, and council approved, the choice of Susanna Niemann O’Neil to fill the position of acting city manager effective Sept. 2. He praised Briley’s exceptional leadership for seven years through ups and downs, saying it had been an honor to work with her.

He proposed, and council approved, suspension of regular council meetings for August, as no legislation is pending. Other committee meetings will take place, as will at least one committee of the whole meeting, to discuss the vacant council seat. A special meeting can be called if needed. Vice Mayor Seren congratulated Briley and wished her good luck. Responding to public comments, he noted that while regular council meetings are suspended, committee meetings will be held, including at least one for administrative services.

Council Member Dunbar, who was on council when Tanisha Briley was hired, said she first noted her qualifications in the areas of budgeting and finance, followed by how much she learned in the job and her professionalism.

Council Member Ungar congratulated Briley, saying it had been a privilege and an honor to work with her.
Cleveland Heights students earn Tri-C fellowships

Maya Serna and Talia Weeks of Cleveland Heights have been selected for Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) Honors Program Fellowships, which offer high-achieving students scholarships to cover tuition, fees and books as they work toward an associate degree.

Serna and Weeks signed commitment letters with Tri-C in a virtual ceremony. Each scholarship—funded by donors to the Cuyahoga Community College Foundation—is valued at up to $5,120 per academic year.

The college’s seventh fellowship class comprises 54 students with GPAs of at least 3.5, and outstanding ACT/SAT scores. By entering the scholarship program, they commit to being full-time students, maintaining a high GPA, and earning a degree from Tri-C within two years.

“These gifted students chose to come here because they understand the power of a Tri-C education,” said Karen Miller, the college’s provost and chief academic officer. “I look forward to celebrating their success at spring commencement in 2022.”

The fellowship places special emphasis on academic planning, mentoring, and portfolio building to reflect student work. Smaller honors class sizes also ensure specialized attention for students.

For information on the fellowship, including eligibility requirements, contact Rebecca Stolzman at 216-987-4713, or rebecca.stolzman@tri-c.edu.

John Horton is the media relations manager at Cuyahoga Community College.

CH Church hosts online forum on immigration

The Immigration Task Force of Forest Hill Church Presbyterian is offering a live educational webinar, “Immigration: History and Current Issues,” on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 7–8:30 p.m.

This forum is intended for those who are seeking a basic understanding of the root causes of immigration problems, and the legal difficulties immigrants currently face. The forum is free, but requires advance registration.

Attorney Brian J. Hoffman, executive director of The Center for Strategic Immigration Litigation and Outreach, will speak on current immigration issues.

John Flores, immigration historian and author of The Mexican Revolution in Chicago (University of Illinois Press, 2018), will speak on the history of immigration in the U.S.

The forum will also highlight the journeys of grief and hope faced by immigrants from Burkina Faso and the Congo, who now reside in Cleveland Heights.

Register at https://bit.ly/ForestHillForum by Sunday, Sept. 27. After registering, you will receive a confirmation e-mail containing information about joining the forum.

For more information about the speakers, and for additional information on immigration issues, go to https://bit.ly/ForestHillImmigration.

Stephen Sedam is a member of the Forest Hill Church Immigration Task Force.

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To learn more about RoxArts, watch the video at www.roxarts.org.
A complete listing of the RoxArts-sponsored artist residencies, art activities, science enrichment, and capital improvements can be found on the website’s About Us page.

Andrea C. Turner is the owner of ACT One Communications, LLC, a marketing communications consulting firm based in Cleveland Heights. She is a RoxArts board member.

Cleveland Heights - University Heights Board of Education
Meeting highlights

JULY 21, 2020
Board President Jodi Sourini and members James Posch, Dan Heintz, Mala Lewis and Beverly Wright were present, as were Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby and Treasurer Scott Gainer. [Virtual meetings are streamed on the district’s YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/CHUSD) and recorded for later viewing.]

Proposed levy and finances
Board President Sourini said she was conflicted about pursuing a levy for the November election—a move the Lay Finance Committee (LFC) has strongly urged. Each school board member also expressed conflicting thoughts and reluctance to increase levy. The Finance Committee had warned it was unsafe to delay another levy, and the board took the warning seriously. After discussing previous cuts, state funding cuts, and additional expenses for pandemic regulations, the board voted to place a 4.8 mill levy, the lowest suggested by the LFC, on the November ballot to pay the district’s current expenses. This amount currently projects the district to have positive year-end balances through fiscal year 2022, provided that current expenses are reduced by at least $2 million.

Updated school calendar
Superintendent Kirby requested a change in the 2020-21 calendar, with school beginning Sept. 2. The board approved the updated school calendar, subject to revision as future developments occur.

Updated school reopening plan
Kirby said “safety first is the foundation of the plan,” which will be phased out on the district-wide site the week of July 27, and includes answers to questions from the community. Health and safety items (sanitizers, masks, etc.) have been purchased, and more will be needed. The schools must follow board of health protocols. In the event of a positive coronavirus case, the CDC recommends a two- to five-day shutdown. Superintendent Kirby will present the final plan for a vote by mid-August.

School reopening update
Superintendent Kirby said work is continuing on a mask policy that is in agreement with LFC’s strong recommendation, they concluded with non-contact competitions. Districts meet [to determine] how to proceed with the COVID pandemic; however, given the discomfort with placing a levy on the ballot during the COVID pandemic, they concluded it was not advisable to wait until 2021 to ask for a levy at higher millage. Should financial considerations change, the levy could be pulled from the ballot as late as early September.

Performance audit and fringe benefits
Responding to community members’ suggestions for a performance audit and cuts in fringe benefits, Board Member Mala Lewis discussed reasons not to proceed with a performance audit at this time, as the proposal is tied to sports and transportation, and other cuts do not seem wiser, and are inconsistent with the good left moneys. Board members cannot commit beforehand to outcomes.

School reopening during COVID pandemic
Superintendent Kirby pointed out that Cuyahoga County is currently at level three on the Ohio Health Advisory System, the next to highest-ranking of COVID infection. Within the county, zip codes 44118 and 44106 are in the highest category, and 44106 is in the second-highest category. Following her presentation, board members discussed educational, social, and safety considerations, ultimately reaching consensus and voting to open the 2020-21 school year remotely.

CARES Act funds
Treasurer Scott Gainer reported that an additional $312,000 in CARES Act funds were available to the district to help with opening costs. Additional CARES funds will be made available to both public and private schools through a competitive grant application process, with a required 50 percent match. These funds must be spent on improving online connectivity for students.

LWV Observer: Kathy Petrey.

JULY 28, 2020
Board members, as well as the superintendent and treasurer, were present.

School reopening update
Superintendent Kirby updated school reopening plans, including the timeline, programs for family engagement during remote learning, and recommendations for athletes. All decisions (taken into account) the Ohio Public Health Advisory System’s risk guidelines. She emphasized that decisions aligning policy with the equity program and the family engagement component will start next week. She will post a weekly update on the district website.

Athletics
The decision will follow the Cuyahoga County Board of Health recommendations for athletes’ safe return to play. Decisions on continued training and in-season sports for high school athletes were made after regularly assessing the board of health’s analysis of COVID-19 spread in the county. Currently, games are suspended until districts meet [to determine] how to proceed with non-contact competitions.

Mask requirements
Superintendent Kirby said work is continuing on a mask policy that is in agreement with NDEO guidelines.

LWV Observer: Roseanne Faigan.

CHUSD Schools
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C. Angel Krasocki, Realtor®

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Heights Observer September 1, 2020

Heights Observer September 1, 2020
Cleveland Heights – University Heights Public Library Board

Meeting highlights

JULY 20, 2020

Board members present were President James Rosso, Vice President Dana Fluellen, Pati Carlyle, Odessa Crenshaw, Max Gue- boic, Annette Iwamoto and Vikas Turakhia.

During the pandemic, with restrictions im- posed on public gatherings, board meet- ings are live streamed for the public and posted the next day on the library’s Face- book page www.facebook.com/heightsli- brary.

Public comments

Coventry PEACE Campus: Ten citizens, some of whom are volunteers or artists-in- residence with Coventry PEACE Campus, spoke in favor of maintaining the campus as an arts and nonprofit organization. In ad- dition, five statements submitted via e-mail were read to the board; only one was in support of the library’s position. Represen- tatives from several organizations urged the library to reconsider its position with respect to the Coventry building and its tenants. An- nette Iwamoto, teacher, Coventry Heights Teacher Union; Shannon Morris of ARTFUL; Deanna Brewer Fishel of FutureBuilds and the Coventry PEACE Campus board; Rachel Williams of the ARTFUL board; Neil Martin of ARTFUL; and Robin Van Lew, an artist tenant. For the library’s policy in handling comments from the audience, the board will give careful (consideration) and respond at a later date.

Advance return

The library took the return of the ad- vocates of $50,000 to its General Fund, which had been used to pay utility bills prior to receiving revenue from tenants at the Heights Boulevard (Coventry PEACE Campus) property.

Amend 2020 appropriations

The board approved an increase of $25,965 for the library bill, through Sept. 30, for the Washington Boulevard property.

Coventry PEACE Campus financials

Nancy Levin, library director, reviewed the financial analysis and facility assessment report prepared by Jeff Hanke, program manager, IFF. The report states that current lease rates project a deficit of $131,025 in a year of any new tenancy in 2020. A diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) audit for the organization. Due to COVID-19, the confidential focus groups will be held via Zoom. The library’s goal is to gather information from not just current library customers who feel positively about the organization, but also from those who don’t use the library, or who use the library but may have had frustrating experiences with the institution. Links to register for fo- cus groups can be found online at https:// heightshlib.org/join-our-focus-groups/ on-diversity-and-equity.

Heights Observer: Elizabeth M. Tracy

Library adapts to pandemic

Sheryl Banks

When libraries and schools across Northeast Ohio started closing on March 17 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Heights Libraries made the difficult decision to close its four branches. Over the weeks that followed, staff worked together remotely to figure out how to serve the Cleveland Heights-University Heights community safely.

“It was a strange and frustrating time,” said Nancy Levin, Heights Libraries director. “Our mission, our entire purpose, is to help people, to provide them with free services and materials to improve their lives. How do you do that from a distance, with closed buildings? Well, never under- determine determined library staff.”

Online services were immedi- ately beefed up, with daily storytimes on the library’s Facebook page start- ing in early April, a new online refer- ence form created in mid-April, and curated lists of resources for families and others created and posted on the library’s website, www.heightshlibrary. org, by the end of April. Digital re- sources and services were promoted through social media, e-mails and a mailing.

May brought the addition of curbside and lobby pickup of mate- rials, and access to faxing and copy- ing. Customers are required to wear masks if they enter a library building, but those who cannot, due to medi- cal or religious reasons, are served curbside.

“There are more items and ser- vices available than many customers may realize,” said Levin, “especially for those customers who may not feel comfortable coming to the build- ings.”

While the library does not cur- rently have print newspapers avail- able, customers can access free online versions of daily and weekly papers, including The New York Times, the Call and Port, the Plain Dealer and the Cleveland Jewish News on its website.

Print magazines are available, and issues can be put on hold by call- ing the main number of any branch. Digital copies are also available through the website, as are movies, e-books and audiobooks.

If customers don’t have Internet access at home, they can check out a wireless mobile hotspot, available at every branch. Heights Libraries recently obtained five more hotspots, to help customers who have previ- ously depended on the library for high-speed Internet.

Customers can also ask staff to print materials for them, which they can then pick up in the lobby, just like a hold. Each branch handles this ser- vice a little differently, so customers are asked to call their favorite branch for instructions: Coventry, 216- 321-3400; Lee Road, 216-932-3600; Noble, 216-291-5665; and University Heights, 216-312-4700.

Library staff hope that limited in-person browsing and computer use can start in mid-September, as long as Cuyahoga County does not progress from red to purple on the Ohio Department of Health’s (ODH) color-coded COVID-19 public health advisory system. The library will fol- low ODH guidelines when it opens, including limiting the number of people allowed in each building at one time, requiring all visitors over the age of 2 to wear masks, and main- taining social distancing of at least six feet.

“We are truly looking forward to offering as many services as possible, as long as we can do so safely,” said Levin.

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

Cartoon by Pete Mueller (Reprinted from Funny Times)

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Dobama offers alternatives to live theater

Colin Anderson

Dobama Theatre’s 2020–21 season will take a different shape due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While Dobama will not be able to welcome patrons into its physical space anytime soon, the theater is planning alternative programming to stay engaged with the community. Most or all of Dobama’s artistic programming this year will be available online.

Like theaters across the globe, Dobama has faced pandemic-related challenges, leading to suspended and canceled performances, as well as cuts to staff and salaries. Thanks to the generosity of Dobama’s members and donors, the theater is hopeful for another live season, to be programmed after an effective treatment or vaccine emerges.

Dobama’s intimate performance space makes social distancing impossible, and health and safety remain its top priorities. Staff continue to work primarily from home, curating artistic and educational programming for the upcoming season.

A year without Mainstage programming gives Dobama the opportunity to make its educational programming even more robust. For the first time, Dobama has received grant funding to perform free playwriting literacy workshops in public schools throughout Northeast Ohio. Playwriting literacy programs have been proven to raise students’ confidence, critical thinking skills, and standardized test scores. Educators are encouraged to contact the Dobama office for more information.

Education Director Carrie Williams is creating a series of documents and tutorial videos to ensure that this program can be conducted virtually or in person, as Dobama strives to serve local educators in this dangerous and uncertain moment. Dobama seeks to provide accessibility to school systems that are underfunded and may lack the resources for this type of programming.

“Educators and parents are doing their best to adapt to changing community needs,” said Williams, “and we are proud to do whatever we can to support them. This requires major planning, and the Dobama team is ready to meet them where they are.”

Dobama’s partnership with Heights Libraries has been a strong hold. The two organizations are working to produce joint programming that serves both of their constituencies. These programs might include a “book club” of plays, and social justice conversations with Artistic Director Nathan Motta and local performers.

Artistic programs for Dobama will include master classes in directing and acting; interviews with local professionals, on topics such as LGBTQ and BIPOC representation in theater; and a series of professionally filmed monologues from past productions.

Dobama will use this time to continue developing and deepening its longstanding partnership with Karamu House.

Through these innovative programs, a continued focus on social justice, and plans for volunteer work throughout the community, Dobama remains committed to serving Cleveland Heights and Northeast Ohio.

In the absence of an in-person season, many members have chosen to “belong” to Dobama in the same way that one might belong to NPR, or the Cleveland Museum of Art. Season memberships for 2020–21 are available for $60, with Young Professional memberships available for $12.

Educational materials and programs are being produced through the generosity of the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, the David and Inez Myers Foundation, the Harry K. and Emma R. Fox Charitable Foundation, and the Music and Drama Club. Dobama is also sustained through the generous support of the Shubert Foundation, the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, the George Gund Foundation, the Cleveland Foundation, the Milton and Tamar Malitz Family Foundation, the Ohio Arts Council, and the citizens of Cuyahoga County through Cuyahoga Arts & Culture.

For more information on programs and memberships, e-mail boxoffice@dobama.org, or visit www.dobama.org.

Colin Anderson is general manager at Dobama Theatre.

Independent Together at Heights Arts

Single isn’t always better—or is it? Viewers can make that decision when they view Heights Arts’ newest exhibition, Independent Together: 30 Years of Collaboration. Featuring Ray Juaire, senior exhibitions manager at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, and his longtime collaborator Patti Fields, head of visual art at the Ranter Montessori School, Fields and Juaire began their personal and professional relationship 30 years ago, while students at the Cleveland Institute of Art.

Fields is known primarily for her jewelry designs, and she brings a jeweler’s detail-oriented aesthetic to her larger pieces in Independent Together. Juaire brings his expertise in sculpting and painting.

The exhibition aims to explore and symbolize the duo’s personal and professional lives, both independent and collaborative. The show taps memories from their long, shared history, and marks the first time these artists will exhibit solo works alongside one another. The combination generates a push-and-pull physicality between the figurative and the literal, which creates an intriguing narrative.

Juaire and Fields have a long history of separately showing works of art as individual artists, as well as jointly exhibiting pieces created during joint collaborations. Their work is included in the public collections of The Progressive Corporation, Metro Health Cleveland, and Case Western Reserve University, among others.

Independent Together: 30 Years of Collaboration will be on display through Oct. 11.

Running concurrently, in Heights Arts’ Spotlight Gallery, is an exhibition of work by artist Joseph Van Kerkhove. A Toledo native, Van Kerkhove is the director of the Diane Kidd Gallery and assistant professor of art at Tiffin University. His exhibition showcases his prints and printmaking techniques, representing his personal experiences. He is also the founder of the EVAC Project, Experiencing Veterans & Artists Collaboration, which has exhibited at Dulles International Airport in Dulles, Va.; Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.; and the Rutherford B. Hayes Library and Museum in Fremont, Ohio.

For more information, or to reserve a time to visit the Heights Arts gallery, at 2175 Lee Road, call 216-371-2457 or visit www.heightsarts.org.

Amanda Bohn handles marketing and communications at Heights Arts.

Museum in Fremont, Ohio.


Amanda Bohn
The summer smell of Cleveland Heights

David Budin

I’m not ready to let go of summer. I would have left last September, and for the previous 40 Septembers. But that’s because I stopped caring about summer. I no longer embraced it as I used to when I was younger—and as I did again this year.

One positive thing that has come from this pandemic—for me, and, I think, many others—has been walking. For a while, everything was closed; there was nowhere to go and nothing to do. We’d been in our homes for weeks. And gyms were closed. Then the weather got nice, and we needed to move, and walking was something to do, with something different to look at.

Walking is not a big deal to many people. It is to me, because I haven’t done it for about 40 years. In that time I tried to stay inside as much as possible. I wasn’t an introvert—I got together with people (inside), I performed for audiences (usually inside), I went to restaurants (almost always sitting inside), and sometimes, cooking (standing inside). But my day-to-day jobs have been writing books and articles (sitting inside), practicing or arranging music (sitting inside), and, sometimes, cooking (standing inside).

Growing up, I walked from my house at Belmar and Mayfield roads to Roosevelt Junior High, at Lee Road and Euclid Heights Boulevard, and, later, to Heights High. In my early teens, every summer day, I walked to Cumberland Park to play softball and hang out all day, and, a little older, I walked all over the city to practice with my rock groups at various band members’ houses.

As a young adult, wherever I lived in Cleveland Heights, I would walk to Coventry Village every day, sometimes twice a day, which could be a distance of two or three miles each way. I was about 40 pounds lighter then (and eating at Tommy’s three times a day). But I stopped walking. For 40 years. Until early May, when I suddenly began again. I’ve walked every day since then. I’m up to two miles a day. At one time—yeah, yeah—I feel a little better (number-one question). But better than that, I have rediscovered how things look, and, more interestingly (to me), how things smell.

In June, the privet hedges’ little flowers were in bloom, and the scent, when I walked past them, took me right back to my childhood. It was not something I thought about when I was a kid, but, rather, it was simply the smell of summer. All these years later, that aroma is kind of intoxicating.

And mulberry trees. When I was 10, I substituted for a kid on his Plain Dealer route for the two weeks that encompassed July 4. It was a seemingly short route—just the south side of Mayfield Road, between Coventry and Middlehurst—one block. But it included six or seven apartment buildings, flanking six houses. And in each apartment building were 15 or 20 customers. So that was, maybe, 150 papers to deliver. But it was early morning, before it got too hot. And in the first three buildings after Coventry, I got to ride up and down in elevators, which I spent quite a bit of time doing. And I got to walk the un-air-conditioned halls and smell the odors. The hallways of those buildings, which were occupied mostly by older European Jews, always smelled like fried foods—liver, cheap cuts of beef, lots of onions.

The kid for whom I was subbing tipped me off that behind the last building on the route, going from west to east, was a mulberry tree. After my final paper was placed carefully at its corresponding door, I would rush around to the back of the building and stand under the tree’s lowest branches eating mulberries. Lots of them.

Walking all around Cleveland Heights this past July, I passed many mulberry trees, and, for the first time since childhood, stopped and ate the berries off the trees. And smelled the ripening fruit, that I had forgotten even had a fragrance.

August has its own outside odors: growing things are already beginning to decay. And September brings more of the same—there’s that fragrance of fallen leaves drying in the sunshine. These are not bad smells. But they’re kind of sad smells. They say, clearly, that this is all going away soon. And then what? In a few weeks, it will be cold. There will be snow. No more long walks outside. No more flowers and trees, for a while. And no more smells—at least not the fresh and natural outdoor kind—for a while.

But I waited 40 years. I can wait six months this time.

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

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