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

Severance's owner has history of violations

W. Dennis Keating

Much of Severance Town Center (STC) is owned by Namdar Realty (namdarrealtygroup.com) and is managed by its partner, Mason Asset Management. Namdar bought STC at auction for \$10.4 million in 2016.

Namdar Realty, based in Great Neck, N.Y., is family-owned. Founded in 1999, it owns several hundred shopping malls across the United States. Igal Namdar heads Namdar Realty, and Elliot Nassim, the cousin of Namdar's wife, heads Mason Asset Management.

Namdar Realty is known for buying "B" and "C" level malls that are "distressed" and "struggling." Many lost their anchor stores as national chains (e.g., Sears, J.C. Penney, Macy's) reduced their number of locations or went out of business.

Namdar's business model is to buy malls at bargain prices, often as a result of court-ordered auctions following foreclosure, and



Namdar Realty buys struggling shopping malls, like Severance Town Center, then spends little to maintain them.

then spend as little as possible on their maintenance. A June 26, 2018, Reuters profile of Namdar Realty and Mason Asset ("Who is Making Money from struggling U.S. Malls?") described their strategy as: "invest

as little as possible on many of their properties . . . the aim is to hold the assets, not redevelop them."

What often has followed is a further decline in the number and

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CH artist unspools time and motion



Cleveland Velodrome, Afternoon, composite photograph by Greg Donley.

Kim Sergio Inglis

In announcing a new exhibition of work by artist Greg Donley, Foothill Galleries owner Michael Weil wrote, "We get the sense [Greg] often is looking down and up and side to side, smiling, looking closely, historically, conscientiously, joyfully, photographically. That is the genesis of his 'still

films,' as he calls them."

Still Moving, G.M. Donley's third exhibition at Foothill Galleries, will run through the month of February, and into at least mid-March. (A closing date has not been set.) Foothill Galleries is located at 2450 Fairmount Blvd., Suite M291.

Donley, a Cleveland Heights

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Best of the Heights voting opens Feb. 1

Jessica Schantz

Beginning Feb. 1, Heights residents can show their appreciation for locally owned, independent businesses by voting for their favorites in the FutureHeights 2023 Best of the Heights awards.

Since 2005, FutureHeights has conducted the Best of the Heights awards as a way to recognize the unique attributes of Heights businesses, and their contributions to the local economy.

"FutureHeights is always proud to support and celebrate our local merchants with the 'Best of the Heights' awards," said Micah Kirman, FutureHeights' interim executive director. "Our quality independent businesses add so much to the health and vitality of our community, and the incredible merchants, who operate them so well, deserve to be recognized."

Each year, Heights residents are invited to cast their votes for their favorite businesses by nominating them for awards in a variety of categories.

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Library welcomes new board member Soto-Schwartz

Sheryl Banks

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System is pleased to announce the appointment of its newest board member, Melissa M. Soto-Schwartz. Her term began in January.

Soto-Schwartz, a professor of history and women's and gender studies at Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C), has lived in Cleveland Heights for 27 years.

Her seven-year term on the library board will end in 2029.



Melissa M. Soto-Schwartz

Soto-Schwartz replaces outgoing board president Gabe Crenshaw,

whose service ended in December 2022.

"Melissa brings years of knowledge and experience to our board, including time serving as the faculty chair of Tri-C's Racial Justice Initiative Advisory Committee," said Heights Libraries Director Nancy Levin. "She also is a passionate fan of public libraries, and a champion of free access to information."

"I am both honored and humbled to be appointed to the board of trustees," said Soto-Schwartz. "I'm

continued on page 12

Letters Policy

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

HEIGHTS OBSERVER

The *Heights Observer* is a citizen-based news source published monthly by FutureHeights, a nonprofit, 501(c)3 organization dedicated to civic engagement and quality of life.

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The views and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the *Heights Observer*, its publisher and staff, or of FutureHeights, its staff and board of directors.

About the Observer

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

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

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

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

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

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

Articles to be considered for the March issue must be submitted by Feb. 6. We publish some articles online only. We also publish an e-newsletter each Tuesday.

Why the Observer isn't a traditional newspaper



OPENING
THE OBSERVER

Bob Rosenbaum

The *Heights Observer's* strength—and its greatest weakness—is the way we come by the information that fills its pages. Every word is an unpaid contribution, uploaded directly to our publishing system by people from the CH-UH area we serve.

It's a strength because it results in a publication people recognize as strongly reflecting the community. It's a weakness because we can't operate the way a traditional newspaper would—assigning reporters to cover important issues and events. There are a lot of goings-on people need or want to know about that we never publish, simply because nobody stepped up to gather the information and write an article. And unless someone comes forward with a seven-figure endowment, it's not likely to change.

That's because the news business isn't the same as it used to be. Across the nation, one out of four newspapers have shut down since 2005. The trend is expected to continue, and those that remain employ fewer reporters to gather information.

During the 2008 recession, if we had tried to launch the *Heights Observer* on the traditional newspapering model, we wouldn't have found the money to get it off the ground, and it couldn't have survived the loss in revenue during the pandemic. We're glad to have a financially viable oper-

ating model, and our focus is on working within the constraints it imposes.

We regularly get calls or e-mails from people who want to direct us to stories that deserve coverage. Our answer is consistent: If there's something you believe should be in the paper, please put it together and submit it to our member center at heightsobserver.org.

We know the idea of gathering facts and organizing them into an article is daunting for a lot of people. It can seem scary if you don't do it regularly. But it's not rocket science either, and my experience is that, with a little direction, most people are able to put together an informative article.

Back when the paper was new, we offered a series of workshops on how to report and write for the *Heights Observer*. We ran them until the attendance tapered off, at which point we figured we had reached the people who were interested. But a decade has passed, and maybe it's time to pick up the trainings again. At this point, we could offer them online. If you'd be interested in attending, please let me know by e-mail (brosenbaum@heightsobserver.org).

Please don't lose sight of the important fact that the *Heights Observer* exists to serve the community, and it's only as good as the articles the community provides.

Cleveland Heights resident Bob Rosenbaum is co-chair of the Heights Observer Advisory Committee, and is responsible for its advertising sales and market development.

BEST OF HEIGHTS continued from page 1

egories. This year's ballot includes popular categories from previous years, as well as new categories that focus on specific services.

Residents are encouraged to vote for their favorite businesses online at www.futureheights.org/programs/best-of-the-heights/, or by using the paper ballot that will appear in the February and March print issues of the *Heights Observer*. (The ballot is on page 13 of this issue.)

Voting will conclude March 15, and the winners will be announced in the May issue of the *Heights Observer*.

All locally owned Cleveland Heights and University Heights businesses are eligible to be nominated.

Each person who submits a valid ballot will qualify for a chance to win one of four packages of gift certificates to local businesses. Additional chances to win can be obtained by becoming a member of FutureHeights: two chances come with the \$20 membership level, and

six are a benefit of the \$60 level.

All proceeds will help to cover the costs of the program.

According to a study conducted by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, each dollar spent at a locally owned, independent business returns three times more money to the local economy than one dollar spent at a chain store. Because local businesses are often owned by people who live in the community, those owners have a natural interest in the community's long-term health, and many participate in community causes.

For more information, call the FutureHeights office at 216-320-1423, or send an e-mail to jschantz@futureheights.org.

Jessica Schantz is the e-news and distribution manager at the Heights Observer, the office manager for FutureHeights, and a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights.

Transportation committee supports lower CH speed limits

To the Editor:

As members of the Cleveland Heights Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), we support the reduction of speed limits on residential portions of certain streets as proposed by Mayor Seren, recommended by city council's Public Safety and Health Committee (chaired by Council Member Larson), and passed by council.

This action by the mayor and council is consistent with the city's Complete and Green Streets Policy, approved by council in 2018, and Council Resolution 96-2021, adopting and supporting the ideals, principles, and concepts of Vision Zero for the city.

The city's lowering of speed limits is also consistent with policy of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). It defines Complete Streets as "streets that are safe, and feel safe, for all users" (emphasis added), and makes Complete Streets the default approach for funding and implementing street improvements.

Our city, with its acclaimed Complete and Green Streets Policy, may be well positioned to receive financial and other assistance in designing and constructing Complete Streets infrastructure improvements.

The city has been criticized in social media and elsewhere for not relying on a traffic engineering study in setting speed limits. However, traffic studies rely on drivers' assessments of safe speed and do not consider the safety assessments of vulnerable users of streets, such as pedestrians (including children, the elderly and disabled, users of [public] transit) and bicyclists.

In 2018, the city's law department concluded that Ohio law authorized the city to declare residential streets not to be through highways, and to [reduce] the applicable speed limit from 35 to 25 mph. Shortly thereafter, a group of Euclid Heights Boulevard-area residents expressed concerns to TAC that, at 35 mph, it was not safe for them or their children to walk or ride bicycles to school or other nearby destinations.

TAC then requested that council declare the residential portions of Euclid Heights Boulevard not to be a through street. At that time, the city was operating under a city manager/council form of government. TAC received no response from the city manager nor council.

We are encouraged by our new elected mayor/council form of government taking meaningful action in furtherance of pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Cindie Carroll-Pankhurst
Howard Maier
Charlie Mosbrook
Kathy Petrey
Catalina Wagers

Cleveland Heights is 'dementia friendly'

Tracey Lind

Six years ago, at the age of 62, I was diagnosed with early onset dementia. On that fateful afternoon, my wife, Emily, and I began a journey into the wilderness of dementia, disability and discernment. We had to accept the reality of my diagnosis: I had to retire early as dean of Trinity Cathedral in Cleveland; Emily had to put our financial and legal affairs in order; and, together, we had to figure out how we were going to live with dementia.

One of the decisions we made was to return to Cleveland Heights. We gave up our newly built dream home in Detroit Shoreway for a 100-year-old house on Scarborough Road. Why? We wanted to be close to family and friends in a neighborhood where I had long-term, embedded memory. We wanted a quiet, safe, walkable community with parks and trees. We wanted local restaurants, grocery stores, bakeries, shops, movie theaters, and fitness facilities. We wanted to be within walking distance of a great public library. And, most importantly, we wanted to live in a diverse community with shared values and vision.

Over the past six years, as I've been making a new life as a retiree in Cleveland Heights, I've found that I'm not alone. I've met many others who are struggling, yet thriving, with various forms of cognitive impairment due to brain injury, disease or aging.

I've learned that dementia is the world's seventh leading cause of death, the foremost reason for disability and financial insecurity among the elderly, and a growing public health crisis. One in three persons over the age of 85, and one in 10 over 65, will have some form of dementia. Based on these statistics, some 200 residents of Cleveland Heights and their families are [likely] living with dementia.

I've learned firsthand that while dementia doesn't discriminate, access to quality care does, sometimes causing financial ruin for those affected by it. I worry that, as baby boomers age, and dementia begins to accelerate at a more rapid pace, this condition could bankrupt Medicare and Medicaid. In this political climate, I'm fearful that we'll start warehousing those who

don't have family support systems, can't take care of themselves, and can't afford assisted living.

There is hope. Anticipating the growth in dementia, cities around the globe are becoming dementia-friendly communities. They are deliberately cultivating a climate where people living with dementia and their families can thrive and remain engaged in the community.

According to the organization Dementia Friendly America (DFA), in dementia-friendly communities, banks, businesses, restaurants and even Uber or Lyft drivers learn how to accommodate customers who have cognitive impairment. First responders learn to recognize the signs of dementia, and act accordingly; health care systems promote early detection, diagnosis and effective interventions; and faith communities intentionally welcome and make accommodations for those living with dementia.

In dementia-friendly communities, local governments design and build housing, transportation, and public spaces that enable people with dementia and their care partners to live independently; residents learn how to interact sensitively and create networks of support; and residential care providers and community agencies offer services to maximize independence and encourage ongoing community involvement.

Last year, DFA designated Cleveland Heights a dementia-friendly community. To celebrate this milestone and continue the journey, the Lee Road branch of Heights Libraries will host Dementia-Friendly Cleveland Heights Week, May 15-20. It will offer programs for individuals living with dementia, care partners and families affected by dementia, community professionals, and concerned neighbors.

I encourage everyone to participate in this year's Dementia-Friendly Week, and help to make Cleveland Heights a year-round dementia-friendly community where people living with dementia, and their families, can find a home with visible and easily accessible support.

Tracey Lind, a Cleveland Heights resident, is the retired dean of Trinity Cathedral, an Episcopal priest, city planner, writer, and photographer.

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CH speed-limit reductions add negligible travel time

Mark Binnig

I'm writing in response to Alan Rapaport's opinion, in the January issue of the *Heights Observer*, regarding lowering speed limits.

Mr. Rapaport claims that lowering the speed limits on five roads will cause it to "take longer to get to shops, banks, restaurants, parks, libraries, churches, and schools," and "will encourage drivers to seek faster shortcuts on side streets."

After reading this, I decided to use Google Maps and some arith-

metic to find out how much longer it will take.

From one border to the other, the lengths of Taylor Road, Lee Road, and Euclid Heights Boulevard are all about 2.7 miles. If one could drive all the way across the city without encountering stop lights or traffic problems, the trip would take 6.5 minutes at 25 mph, and 4.6 minutes at 35 mph.

Noble Road in Cleveland Heights only covers about 2.2 miles, so the trip at 25 mph would take 5 minutes; at 35 mph, 3.7 minutes.

In actual fact, the [35 mph] time savings for all of these routes is less than [the times stated above] because there already were 25 mph zones on parts of these streets.

If Mr. Rapoport is concerned about being late to his shop, bank, restaurant, park, library, church or school, he could leave just 1.5 minutes earlier. I don't think the city needs to spend money on a study to find out that lowering the speed limit makes the streets safer for cars, pedestrians, and bicycles.

For myself, I no longer have to be vigilant about which sections of these roads have 25 mph limits.

Mark Binnig has been a resident of Cleveland Heights for more than 40 years.

Clear snow for postal carriers

Alice Jeresko

The Cleveland Heights U.S. Post Office is seriously understaffed, affecting not just our deliveries, but the health and safety of the postal carriers.

They are literally burdened with long hours in rain, snow, ice and mud trying to cover unfilled carrier positions. They are working in fatiguing and stressful conditions with increased potential for injury. In the worst situations, they are subject to robberies and shootings.

Cleveland Heights residents can help ensure postal carriers' routes are as safe and unobstructed as possible. Remember, they are working long hours, into the evenings when natural lighting is dim. Many carriers may be filling in on an unfamiliar street.

Here are some things you can do to help them—and your neighbors, delivery services and emergency providers:

- Keep main sidewalks clear of snow, ice, mud and any fallen debris or obstructions (including your dog's poop—a most unpleasant, but frequent, slip hazard).
- Clear a path from the sidewalk to your mailbox. Porches, steps and railings should be clear and secure enough to navigate while carrying a heavy package or mailbag.
- If possible, shovel a "shortcut" path directly from your neighbors'

houses to your own; this can save many extra steps for postal carriers.

- Turn on outdoor lighting near dusk or during heavy rain or snow; turn it off after mail is delivered. Make sure your house address and mailbox are easy to find.
- Park cars in drives where they don't obstruct a path to the mailbox, if space allows.
- If you will be away, arrange for a neighbor or service to clear snow on your property.
- If you know a neighbor can't shovel for some reason, find a way to help them—share the responsibility with capable teens or other neighbors.

Some cities, like Lakewood, have volunteer neighbor-to-neighbor snow-clearing programs. Council Member Gail Larson is looking into options for Cleveland Heights, and we can expect to hear more.

Thankfully, I live on a street with very generous neighbors who routinely use their own snowblowers to clear sidewalks on both sides of our street. They set an example of civic goodwill and lessen the load for everyone else—but they can't do it all.

Whether you are a homeowner or a renter, snow needs to be cleared for access to your mailbox. Be a good neighbor and do your part.

At the Jan. 3 CH City Council meeting, several persons made public comments regarding postal delivery problems. The U.S. Postal Service

continued on page 12

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I'm sad to say goodbye to Josie Moore

Alan Rapoport

Those serving in public office sacrifice a lot. Many qualified people decline to seek election for that reason. Others decide after their election that the sacrifice is too great. One of those others is Josie Moore, who recently resigned from Cleveland Heights City Council.

Moore had ideas about how CH City Hall should operate under a new system. She thought the mayor and council members need to be “willing to reach out, discuss ideas and concerns, and be responsive to each other in a spirit of collaboration and problem-solving.” She called for leadership that sees civil disagreement as “an opportunity to find pathways for improvement.” She considered “open, ongoing, and respectful communication as the key to an effective working relationship that enables the achievement of our city’s goals.”

Politics can be a nasty business. Moore was perhaps too optimistic. Given the cast of characters, she perhaps was even a little naïve.

I disagreed with Moore’s more “progressive” goals. But watching her perform, I admired her energy, intelligence, and organizational skills. Moore did occasional virtue signaling. But she did much more. As chair of the Municipal Services Committee, Moore tackled mundane

but important subjects, like street lighting and snow removal. She set agendas, managed meetings, and worked hard with others to achieve results. Moore was productive. Our city council needs members like her.

Over time, things went wrong for Moore. As she stated in her own words, she felt she was “in the dark, the ground was continually shifting under my feet, the goalposts kept moving, while my intentions and actions were repeatedly and unkindly mischaracterized.” Moore says she quit to protect her “mental health” and “physical well-being.” Hopefully she will find other ways to stay involved with our community.

Council members and the mayor should accept that Moore resigned because of an unnecessarily hostile environment they helped foster. Moving forward they should remedy that situation.

I am sad that Moore is leaving. And many experienced city employees left this past year for other opportunities. This is a bad sign. Making government service attractive to people with talent must be a prime objective. But it is not enough merely to attract and hire such people. It also is important to help them want to stay.

Alan Rapoport, a longtime resident of Cleveland Heights, served on CH City Council (1980–87) and as council president/mayor (1982–87).

Moore’s supporters deserve similar representation

Catalina Wagers

Years before climate change, environmental justice, and Vision Zero became mainstream concepts, Mary Dunbar, former Cleveland Heights council member, recognized that the environment and the health of the community are inextricably interconnected. She became an advocate for a greener and healthier Cleveland Heights.

After Ms. Dunbar’s untimely resignation from council, Josie Moore stepped in to fill the vacated seat with a passion and clarity that was reassuring and energizing. She brought fresh energy and a platform befitting a city that perceives itself as progressive and welcoming. She offered a vision for a holistic and collaborative approach to decision-making that considered the potential impact of policies and projects on the economy, housing, social equity, and the environment. She recognized the severe and immediate threat that climate change poses to human society and the natural world, and she presented sound and actionable steps to not only mitigate the impact of a warming climate but build a resilient, thriving, and equitable community.

One year later, [with Moore’s resignation from council,] those of us who voted for Ms. Moore and her vision in November 2021 are left to wonder what could have been. Moore’s progressive agenda was ambitious and a direct chal-

lenge to the status quo; but with a new council and new form of government in place, her timing felt right.

Ms. Moore deserves gratitude and recognition for her efforts to effect progressive change in Cleveland Heights. She was a steadfast champion of the issues that mattered to the constituents who voted for her.

As council members sift through 20-plus applications for the vacated seat, it is important [that they] keep in mind that Ms. Moore’s constituency deserves to be represented by a council member who is willing and able to approach decision-making and policy-making with an understanding that economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental health are interconnected and mutually dependent. [We need] a strong advocate for a more sustainable Cleveland Heights, willing to lead with urgency and determination; a person who understands that failure to act will only exacerbate the existing problems and make [them] more difficult and more expensive to address in the future.

Catalina Wagers is an eight-year resident of the Fairfax neighborhood. She is actively involved with several local organizations, supporting causes and programs focused on better access to education, policy advocacy, and environmental protection. She is co-founder of Cleveland Heights Green Team.



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Funds support COVID recovery in schools



THE COMMON GOOD

Susie Kaeser

Inadequate school funding is an old and tragic story in Ohio. Those who defend this reality like to say money doesn't matter, but the federal government has a different view. In 2021 Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and granted \$130 billion in Elementary Secondary School Emergency

Relief (ESSER) funds to states and school districts to help students "recover, succeed and thrive."

Ohio received \$4.475 billion to award to local school districts. The Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District received \$17.1 million to spend by September 2024. That's equivalent to about \$1,200 a year per student, for three years. The funds are a one-time resource specifically dedicated to recovering from the negative impact of the pandemic on students and school operations. This infusion of federal funds provides needed relief from years of funding shortfalls that constrain plans and options for helping students.

It's hard to comprehend what \$130 billion looks like, but how those funds are spent is what matters. Federal guidelines allow expenditures in three areas: making it possible for schools to safely remain open for in-person learning, helping students grow academically, and supporting students' mental health needs. These broad goals give districts lots of

room to fashion strategies to promote recovery. While recovering from the pandemic is a long-term proposition, three years of funding gives school districts a fighting chance to right the ship.

Each school district develops its own plan. The CH-UH district website lists the components of its recovery plan: increase student learning, address needs of the whole child, ensure COVID-19 health and safety, and engage with families. These are in keeping with federal guidelines and the basics of healthy school districts.

I'm impressed that ARPA recognizes the importance of mental health, which education fundamentalists don't consider to be in the purview of daily life in schools. But isolation, fear and loss—three core features of life during the pandemic—have taken a toll on all of us and cannot be ignored.

Federal funding has not produced a lot of shiny new solutions. Rather, more resources have made it possible to hire more people who can implement tried-and-true activities, including more time for learning and more personal attention.

One example is in-school tutoring. Our school district has employed a cadre of three to five professionals in each of our seven elementary schools—mostly retired and former classroom teachers—who each spends up to 20 hours a week working with kids who need to catch up. They target students who are not already receiving extra services, and, to minimize the loss of time with the classroom teacher, tutors are "pushed into" the classroom to work alongside classroom teachers. They also pull kids out for one-on-one or small-group work during times set aside for that.

Robin Koslen, a retired special-education teacher, has put her well-honed skills to work at Noble Elementary School. One of the first tutors employed by the district, she started at Noble last spring. Koslen spends most of her time with third-graders—students who lost the formative years for reading. "I feel useful," said Koslen, who sees progress and feels like she is supporting dedicated and caring teachers. "I've learned so much from these phenomenal teachers."

When the Ohio legislature passed the last state budget, they relied on the federal funds to make up for the shortfall in funding for the Fair School Funding Plan. As school districts demonstrate what is possible with this improved level of funding, I hope lawmakers will see that money does matter. When the next budget is approved this June, they need to fill the funding gap that the end of ESSER funds will create.

Susie Kaeser moved to Cleveland Heights in 1979. She is the former director of Reaching Heights, and is active with the Heights Coalition for Public Education and the League of Women Voters. A community booster, she is the author of a book about local activism, Resisting Segregation.

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From his lifelong work as an astronomer to his recent work in pottery and everything in between, Peter is always searching for new things to explore.

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HEIGHTS OF DEMOCRACY

Deborah Van Kleef and Carla Rautenberg

On Jan. 3, we witnessed a Cleveland Heights City Council meeting that lasted an hour and seven minutes, but felt interminable.

Mayor Kahlil Seren made two brief announcements, but inexplicably did not mention the Dec. 23-24 life-threatening storm Elliott and attendant heavy snowfall, which had choked some residential streets in the city for days. Nor did he utter a word about when the Community Center, closed due to flooding caused by Elliott's sub-zero temperatures, might reopen.

Public comments ranged from polite complaints about unplowed streets to abusively long harangues by speakers who rudely ignored reminders that they had exceeded their three-minute time limit.

During council's comment period, some members monopolized the floor to deliver state-of-the-city addresses, grandstand about their own accomplishments, or malign their cohorts. (Council members Craig Cobb and Gail Larson maintained their customary self-discipline.)

After not gaveling to silence long-winded residents, nor certain pontificating members of her own council who far exceeded their time, Council President Melody Hart lost her temper, scolded her council, and abruptly adjourned the proceedings.

As Hart said, it was embarrassing. Certainly, it was an inauspicious beginning to 2023.

Seeking to understand recent lapses in city services and basic communications, we e-mailed a series of questions to City Administrator Joseph Sinnott, cc'ing the mayor. Some of Sinnott's answers proved insufficient, requiring us to follow up. We appreciate his prompt responses to both queries; however, many replies were disappointingly evasive or inadequate, leaving us scarcely better informed than before. (Because we lack the space to summarize our lengthy e-mail exchanges with Sin-

nott, we invite any interested readers to e-mail us at heightsdemocracy@gmail.com and we will provide the full text.)

Council's second 2023 meeting, held Jan. 17, lasted only 55 minutes and felt rushed.

Nevertheless, Seren seemed relaxed and was almost loquacious. To our surprise, he reported, "In the last snowfall [Jan. 14] . . . we received no complaints in the mayor's office for snow-clearing and salting." This, after barely three inches of snow; whereas he has yet to address the administration's woeful communications and snow removal during storm Elliott three weeks earlier.

No one on city council appeared relaxed, least of all President Hart. She rushed through an agenda that stated three times, regarding comments by council or the public, "Council President reserves the right to reduce time limit." Her reluctance to use the gavel is no excuse for muzzling people by arbitrarily restricting their time on the spot. With careful preparation, one can make a big impact in three minutes or less. Think of Abraham Lincoln and the Gettysburg Address. Hart seems

to want to bring down the hammer without wielding her gavel.

At the Jan. 17 meeting, 13 ice hockey advocates—players, coaches, parents and grandparents—showed up and waited their turn to comment. As it turned out, President Hart did not shorten speakers' time, and none exceeded their three minutes. They were distraught at the recent closure of Cleveland Heights' Olympic-size North Rink due to storm damage, coming on the heels of losing their customary wintertime access to the South Rink.

Many, including three generations of one family, spoke about how important those rinks are—not just to them, but to the city's position in the wider region. (The City News e-mailed late Friday, Jan. 20, announced that the North Rink would re-open on Monday, Jan. 23.)

And they demonstrated what a crisis the administration's failure to communicate with the public has become, a full year into the new mayor's first term. While one speaker thanked Seren for having mentioned in his remarks the fact that North Rink repairs were

still being investigated, another asked, "Mr. Mayor, do you get your e-mails, or do you even read them? . . . Who's in charge?"

The long-awaited "mayor's action center" coordinator, slated to be hired soon, is supposed to be able to solve this problem by answering residents' questions, or routing them to staff who can help. We have reservations because we have yet to learn how calls will be tracked and outcomes documented, or who will be privy to that information. Furthermore, even a highly effective coordinator won't replace direct access to the mayor.

Seren needs to institute regular events—some combination of open office hours, town halls, and/or resident forums—for constituents to engage with him directly. A mayor cannot lead at arms length; it's a people-facing job. Seren is a smart man, and we hope he grasps this soon.

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

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University Heights City Council Meeting highlights

DECEMBER 19, 2022 - regular meeting

Present were Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan, Vice Mayor Michelle Weiss, and council members Barbara Blankfeld, Christopher Cooney, Justin Gould, Brian J. King, John P. Rach, and Sheri Sax. Also present were Kelly Thomas, clerk of council; Luke McConville, law director; and Dennis Kennedy, finance director.

Mayor's report

As Twitter under Elon Musk's leadership now "coddles" anti-Semites and censors journalists, University Heights, as a diverse community and welcoming city, has suspended its Twitter account.

Cleveland Kosher Food Pantry donation

Council authorized a donation of \$10,000 of its ARPA funds to the Cleveland Kosher Food Pantry, on emergency, so that the mayor and council could present the donation immediately.

University Square MOU

Council approved a non-binding memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the current stakeholders in University Square, including KL Holdings LLC, Macy's, and Target. The Community Improvement Corporation (CIC), a separate entity from the city of University Heights, would take ownership of the University Square garage, and thus provide a layer of protection to the city for liability and responsibility.

The mayor noted that, while he has had misgivings about the CIC in the past, this was the kind of project that the CIC was [intended] to undertake when it was created.

The mayor and law director noted features of the proposal, which include a retail tenant, apartments, and greenspace.

CIC funding

At the mayor's request, council voted to override his veto of council's passage of additional funding for the CIC at the Dec. 5 city council meeting. In light of the MOU for the University Square project, he no longer has an objection to additional funding being provided to the CIC.

2023 budget

Council approved the 2023 budget on third reading. This budget was proposed by the mayor and reflects changes recommended by council.

Aleksander Shul lawsuits

With council members Gould and Cooney voting no, council authorized the mayor to enter into a settlement of two lawsuits with Aleksander Shul, a religious institution located in University Heights [that is] attempting to build new facilities. There was some public discussion of the lawsuit until Law Director McConville expressed the need [to move] further discussion [to] executive session, as is customary for ongoing litigation.

The lawsuits basically challenge the University Heights ordinance that prevented construction of a new shul. The parties would

agree that, other than requisite permits and inspections, and an administrative review for their new structure, Aleksander Shul would be subject to no further administrative processes, including review by the Board of Zoning Appeals or the Architectural Review Board. Cooney expressed concern about bypassing the planning commission. Gould was concerned about review of the project bypassing council, and claimed the proposed settlement was not transparent.

LWV Observer: Marilyn Singer.

JANUARY 3, 2023 - regular meeting

The mayor and all council members were present, as were the clerk of council, law director and finance director.

Mayor's report

The State of the City address will be held Wednesday, Feb. 15, at John Carroll University's Dolan Science Center. Mayor Brennan presented a preview, which included accomplishments and some ongoing issues, including trash pickup and recycling.

Council actions

Council approved the proposed reconstruction of the UH City Hall entrance roof, which increased in cost from \$18,500 to \$24,500 after the Architectural Review Board reviewed the proposal and requested changes.

Moving back to City Hall

After some research, Law Director McConville determined that the city must make its facilities ADA accessible. [The current council chambers in City Hall is on the second floor, accessible only by stairs; council has been meeting at the former Wiley school building.] Providing a service to a disabled person that is different from that provided to others makes a remote viewing area discriminatory and non-compliant.

Council discussed a variety of issues concerning the intelligibility of recordings, the need to return to City Hall, the expenses that would entail, issues regarding compatibility between school district and city equipment, the value of and difficulties with streaming, and other IT considerations.

Mayor Brennan noted that once the city has an IT contract there will be more options. Legally, in-person access is required while streaming is not, and the city may not be able to make meetings accessible in-person and have reliable streaming. The city is about to file an eminent domain action for the property next door to City Hall. There is an accessible meeting room on that property that could be [come] new council chambers.

Council approved a motion directing the clerk of council to work with the law department to identify ADA-compliant options for returning to City Hall.

LWV Observer: Marilyn Singer.

SEVERANCE continued from page 1



Namdar Realty has declined incentives, offered by local governments in several states, to redevelop its high-vacancy shopping centers.

quality of tenants. Namdar profits from the rents it collects from the remaining tenants and, if possible, by subdividing the malls in order to sell off individual parcels. For example, in 2019 Namdar sold the STC Home Depot for \$13.7 million to a California investor (who then sold it to a Maryland buyer in 2022).

Namdar Realty buys malls with cash offers and with loans. The Israeli Discount Bank of New York City is one of its lenders. Another source of capital is bonds, which it sells on Israel's Tel Aviv stock market.

Due to the physical decline of many of its malls, Namdar Realty has been described in news articles as a "slumlord." It has been sued by dissatisfied tenants, unpaid creditors, and local governments. In extreme cases, local governments have cited Namdar's malls/buildings as "public nuisances," and demanded that Namdar either repair their properties [that are] in serious violation of local codes, or demolish them. Namdar has a well-documented history of failing to comply with many of these municipal orders.

Two Ohio examples are the Midway Plaza in Tallmadge (bordering Akron) and the West Park Shopping Center in Mansfield. In both cases, some of the buildings in these malls have been condemned and face possible demolition. Both malls have been put up for sale by Namdar Realty.

In a white paper [public report] prepared by the Severance Action Group (SAG) affiliated with FutureHeights, these and other examples have been described in detail, based on articles in local news outlets and national media. [View SAG's work at www.futureheights.org/partners/sag/.]

A Jan. 22, 2021, *New York Times* article ("Inside mall owner Namdar's rapid growth story") discussed problems in six Namdar-owned malls, including its mall in Mansfield. That city has recently ordered the demolition of some of the mall's buildings that are considered a public nuisance.

At STC, the poor condition of the parking lots, with hundreds

of potholes, has been noticeable. Dave's Market, in the absence of adequate maintenance by Mason Asset, paved the parking lot in front of its store at its own expense. In 2022, after being cited by the city, Mason Asset filled the potholes (as opposed to repaving the parking lots). This is a recurrent pattern for Namdar Realty-owned troubled malls—when cited for code violations, respond with minimal maintenance wherever possible.

In cases like STC, where properties have many vacancies, local governments in Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, as well as Ohio, have tried to interest Namdar Realty in redeveloping significantly empty malls that have lost their anchor tenants. They have offered Namdar incentives and sought to find prospective purchasers for mixed-use development. The results have been consistent: Namdar Realty has declined to participate in the redevelopment of these malls, leaving these properties as a "blight" in many cities.

Any effort to redevelop STC into a vibrant, mixed-use site, and an asset to the community, must face these realities regarding Namdar Realty.

In his 2021 League of Women Voters' campaign profile, CH City Council Vice President Craig Cobb warned, "Efforts at redevelopment are hampered by Namdar, a real estate investor that specializes in buying distressed shopping malls in foreclosure to hold them as assets in their real estate portfolio versus redevelopment. A strategy (strict code enforcement, no parcel subdivision) must be employed to pressure Namdar to work with the [city] on redevelopment."

W. Dennis Keating, a longtime Cleveland Heights resident, is a volunteer with FutureHeights and SAG, which has been working for the comprehensive redevelopment of Severance Town Center. He wrote this to explore the impact of the owner on Severance's future.

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Cleveland Heights City Council

Meeting highlights



DECEMBER 27, 2022 - regular meeting

Present were Mayor Kahlil Seren, Council President Melody Joy Hart, Council Vice President Craig Cobb, and council members Tony Cuda, Gail Larson, and Anthony Mattox Jr. Davida Russell was not present. Also present were Addie Balester, clerk of council, and Laure Wagner, assistant law director. (The meeting took three minutes; there was one agenda item.)

Insurance contract

On second reading and on emergency, council authorized a contract with Public Entities Pool of Ohio to join its self-insurance pool for property, vehicles, law enforcement, general, employment practices, and public official risk protection and liability coverage for calendar year 2023.

LWV Observer: Jill Tatem.

JANUARY 3, 2023 - regular meeting

The mayor and all council members were present, as were the clerk of council and William Hanna, law director.

Public comments

Two residents criticized the city's snow removal efforts.

A resident expressed thanks to Davida Russell, and urged her not to resign from council.

A resident expressed frustration at the lack of follow-up to problems raised during council meetings' public comment period.

A resident expressed discontent with the new form of government, [the] continuing inequitable treatment of some neighborhoods, and [the] discourteous behavior of some council members in committee of the whole meetings.

Resident Erick Poston, president of Branch 40 of the National Association of Letter Carriers, and another resident who is a retired letter carrier, described the staffing issues undermining timely mail delivery, including vacancies, long hours, and low retention.

Mayor's report

Mayor Seren invited council members to schedule ride-alongs with the police. Following council members, members of the Racial Justice Task Force, and then the public would be able to schedule ride-alongs.

Council actions

Gail Larson was sworn in. [She was elected to council in November 2022, after previously having been appointed to council.]

Offered on first reading, with no vote, was a resolution for an agreement with Schonhardt & Associates to assist the Finance Department in preparing Annual Comprehensive Finance Reports (ACFRs) for 2022, 2023, 2024. Total fees and expenses are not to exceed \$60,000. ACFRs are required by the Ohio auditor.

Council member comments

Craig Cobb reported openings on several boards and commissions and urged

interested residents to apply. He invited residents who have questions or concerns on any city issues to contact him.

Davida Russell reported that city park shelter reservations for May through September will open Jan. 9. Cain Park is inviting artist applications for the 2023 Cain Park Arts Fest. She described her priorities for 2023 and recent progress, thanked many who partner with her, and invited residents to contact her with questions or concerns.

Tony Cuda commented on issues raised by Josie Moore in her resignation from council. He expressed dissatisfaction with administrative responses to council requests for information. He asked council to develop its rules and a shared understanding of its role, and to address legitimate concerns and problems. He asked the mayor to support council's ability to meet with directors and to ask questions via phone calls.

Anthony Mattox Jr. challenged assertions of some council members about a lack of information from the administration, voiced dissatisfaction with his own treatment by some council members, and urged honest and open communication. He invited residents to contact him with questions. He announced that the January meeting of the Planning and Development Committee would discuss gap financing, and that Park Synagogue redevelopment would be discussed at the Jan. 17 committee of the whole meeting.

Gail Larson announced that the Jan. 17 meeting of the Public Safety and Health Committee would discuss sidewalk repair and sidewalk snow removal. She thanked those who had assisted her campaign and voters for electing her. She urged residents to participate in blood drives and consider applying for city boards and commissions.

In response to complaints voiced by some council members about others, Melody Hart urged members to treat each other with respect and to resolve differences in direct conversations.

Committee of the whole

The committee discussed legislation proposed by Russell related to the Mayor's Action Center. Russell said she intended to support the Mayor's Action Center and expressed her frustration that other council members had not responded to her requests for feedback. Mayor Seren voiced his opposition to the measure as duplicative, as council had already supported the initiative by funding it in the 2023 budget. Hart requested that all council members e-mail their feedback to Russell by the end of the week.

Vacancies on boards and commissions were described, as were the process and timeline for making appointments, and measures to encourage more applicants.

LWV Observer: Jill Tatem.



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CH City Council has until Feb. 4 to appoint a new council member from a field of 20 applicants.

Cleveland Heights council appointment deadline nears

Kim Sergio Inglis

A special meeting of Cleveland Heights City Council, scheduled for Monday evening, Jan. 30, had a single agenda item: Appointment of a Council Member.

With the same-day cancellation of the Jan. 30 meeting, that agenda item has moved to a Feb. 2 special meeting, scheduled for 10 a.m.

CH City Council has until Saturday, Feb. 4, to appoint a new council member to fill the seat formerly held by Josie Moore.

According to the city charter, council has 45 days in which to appoint a new council member. If council were to fail to appoint someone by the deadline, the mayor would then have 10 days in which to fill the seat.

According to Ordinance 2400, which council passed on Jan. 3, 2022, “[t]he resignation of a member of Council shall not take effect until the resignation has been accepted by vote by a majority of Council members exclusive of the person tendering the resignation.”

While Moore resigned on Dec. 16, council voted to accept Moore’s resignation on Dec. 21; thus, it has until Feb. 4 to appoint the new council member.

Moore was elected to CH City Council in November 2021, to serve the remainder of the unexpired council term of Mary Dunbar. That

term ends on Dec. 31, 2023; the seat will be on the ballot this coming November.

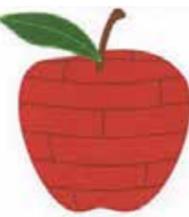
There were 26 applicants originally, six of whom withdrew their names from consideration during the selection process.

The remaining applicants are: Harriet Applegate, Lee Barbee II, Janine Boyd, Sara Brintnall, Jeanne Gordon, Drew Herzig, Sheronda Isler-Hunter, Neal Kreisler, Jennifer Lang, Tas Nadas, Jim Petras, Shelli Reeves, Eric Silverman, Akshai Singh, Jonathon Slater, Al Snodgrass, Paul Volpe, Cole Ware, James Williams, Ray Wilson.

Their applications can be viewed on the city’s website, at www.clevelandheights.gov/1144/City-Council-Ap-plicants, along with videotaped interviews for each applicant, conducted by the League of Women Voters of Greater Cleveland, Heights Chapter.

CH City Council is also in the process of selecting residents to serve on the city’s new Charter Review Commission. Per a Dec. 5 council resolution, council will appoint six commissioners, and Mayor Seren will select three.

Kim Sergio Inglis is editor-in-chief of the Heights Observer. A former master gardener volunteer, she’s looking forward to adding more native plants to her own garden this year.



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Help rebuild Coventry playground

Erick Kauffman

I first met Coventry playground on a fine July morning in 2000.

Fate, in the form of a loan-repayment contract for my medical-school borrowings, had brought me to Cleveland from Seattle. My wife and I bought a home on Berkshire Road, not far from Coventry school. We flew to Cleveland with a few suitcases, our two young boys, and two cats. Mix-ups delayed the moving truck, which included the truly important stuff like tricycles, Legos and toys. What to do with these rambunctious boys stuck in an empty home?

We went for a walk the next morning and found, just down the street, the coolest park I had ever seen, Coventry Park, a marvelous tumble of wood beams and tractor tires, zip lines, bridges and bright roofs. The park became the highlight of our summer, with daily visits to tear around the park and zoom down the slide.

We settled into our lives in Cleveland Heights. Work went well. We added a daughter, lost a cat, and the kids got old enough to attend Coventry school. I got involved in the PTA and got to know some great families.

I learned that the park was an ambitious offshoot of the Coventry school PTA. A motivated group of parents, with input from the students, had designed the park, raised money, and then built the

park in a massive, coordinated community effort in 1993. Anyone who was there, during the two weeks it took to build the park, recalls it as having had the energy of a community barn raising.

I was smitten with the whole vibe of the playground. I got involved with the Coventry PEACE group and became president when it was my time to assume the role. We raised money for park upkeep with T-shirt sales and frantic lemonade stands at Coventry street fairs.

What really stole my heart were the community workdays that we organized in spring and fall to keep the park in good order. They were an explosion of human spirit and energy. We usually had more than 100 volunteers to clean, fix, weed, plant, paint, or do whatever was needed to maintain the park. We had neighbors, families, Heights High athletes, middle-schoolers, college students, boy scouts and passersby—all working, even in the worst weather, to make it fresh and good again.

The closing of Coventry school in 2006 put the fate of the park in jeopardy—while the years and vigorous play continued to wear on the park. We continued to clean and repair it, not knowing how long the structures could reasonably hold up, nor their ultimate fate.

In 2017, Heights Libraries assumed ownership of Coventry

PEACE Campus—a move that took courage, and the vision to imagine an outdoor play space as an extension of the community-building that libraries perform.

The playground's fate was now more secure, but I decided my work would not be done until I saw a new and grand park rebuilt on the Coventry Campus. In my 22 years of growing older alongside Coventry PEACE Park, I [developed] a bucket list, and high up on that list is "redevelop Coventry Park."

I joined the board of the Fund for the Future of Heights Libraries (FFHL), an advocacy nonprofit that is part of Heights Libraries, which is raising funds for a new park, [with a goal of] \$1.2 million. (Yes, inflation has hit the playground world as well.)

We are going to do it! We are going to rebuild this marvelous space—a place for unstructured play, meeting neighbors, sitting around, drum circles, sledding, summer movies, Frisbee, rolling down a hill, or whatever.

I hope that you will be part of the effort, as a volunteer or as a donor—not so that I can check it off my bucket list, but because it is now on your bucket list as well!

Erick Kauffman, a Cleveland Heights resident, is a former president of Coventry PEACE, an FFHL board member, a community-medicine physician, and an activist.

LIBRARY continued from page 1

looking forward to working with the other board members, who are just as dedicated to preserving our Heights Libraries heritage and commitment to intellectual freedom, freedom of the press, and overall community development.

"Libraries have always been a place of awe and inspiration for me; and knowing that I will now play a part in the care, safe guarding, and preservation of a library system is an incredible privilege."

Soto-Schwartz is a member of the Organization of American Historians, and sings in the women's choir Kol Isha at the Temple-Tifereth Israel.

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

CLEAR SNOW continued from page 4

(USPS) is operated by the federal government and is undergoing reform. The city has no control over federal postal worker hours, conditions, or hiring.

To complain about postal staffing shortages and service issues, Heights residents can contact the USPS, U.S. Rep. Shontel Brown, or U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown or J.D. Vance and demand action. Postal workers themselves can file grievances and demand relief through their respective unions and representatives.

Alice Jeresko is an environmental advocate who first moved to Cleveland Heights in 1998.



Eddie's Irises, composite photograph by Greg Donley.

ARTIST continued from page 1

resident, said of *Still Moving*, "A lot of the works concern themselves explicitly with motion. There's a group that's all out bikes—from a local bicycle track race to the Tour De France, and a sequence made during a bike ride in Hunting Valley.

"Others are landscape images that reflect the passage of time in one way or another—flowers blooming, seasons changing, glaciers retreating."

Donley creates each piece through

superimposing and overlapping a series of 20 to 40 images to make a single, "super-wide," composite image, measuring 8-inches high, by 6- to 8-feet wide.

"Because the images are so wide," said Donley, "you can't really take it in all at once. You can see it from a distance, but without the detail; and you lean close to get the detail, but then you can't see the whole thing. You literally have to take a few steps to get all the detail.

So you experience it over time, just as the images were originally captured over time."

"The extremely horizontal format kind of forces a viewer to understand it as a timeline in some way, especially since the sequence embodied in each piece does take place over time," explained Donley. "I see this body of work as like still films: it's a single image, but made up of other still images that have been grabbed over some amount of time,

from a few seconds to a few minutes, or even longer sometimes. The look of it is a little bit disjointed, almost like when movies used to get off their tracks and kind of stutter between frames in old-style film projectors. Our handy human brains take that disjointed material and fill in blanks to make sense of it, make it into a narrative."

Donley, a volunteer editor for the *Heights Observer*, was the original designer for the publication, establishing many of the style and layout elements that are still used by the current production team.

Kim Sergio Inglis is editor-in-chief of the Heights Observer, and a former Cuyaboga County master gardener volunteer who thinks this might be the year that her own garden takes steps toward presentability.



Apply by March 15 for a FutureHeights mini-grant



Mini-grant dollars at work at Millikin Playground.

Sarah Wolf

FutureHeights is now accepting applications for its spring 2023 Neighborhoods Mini-Grants program. Applications are due March 15.

Now in its eighth year, the program offers awards of up to \$1,000 for community-building projects, programs, and initiatives at the neighborhood level, in Cleveland Heights or University Heights.

Applicants are not required to have 501(c)3 nonprofit standing to be considered.

FutureHeights designed the

program to enable neighborhood and grassroots-level groups to have access to funding that, without the nonprofit designation, otherwise can be challenging to acquire.

Since establishing its Neighborhood Mini-Grant program in 2015, FutureHeights has awarded a total of \$50,538 to 75 projects across the Heights.

There are two rounds of applications per year, one in the spring and one in the fall. The deadline to apply for the fall round of mini-grants will be Sept. 15.

To learn more about the criteria for the mini-grants, and to access

the application online, visit www.futureheights.org; or, send an e-mail to swolf@futureheights.org.

Sarah Wolf is the community-building programs manager at FutureHeights.

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Rather vote online? Click on the QR code above, or visit www.futureheights.org/programs/best-of-the-heights, to access the virtual ballot.

Please note that all nominated businesses must be locally owned and located in Cleveland Heights unless otherwise specified. One ballot per person. Deadline for submission is March 15.

Best Cleveland Heights Restaurant or Bar _____

Best Cleveland Heights Business (other) _____

Best New Cleveland Heights Restaurant or Bar _____

Best New Cleveland Heights Business (other) _____

Best University Heights Business (overall) _____

Yummiest Delectables (candy, pastries, artisanal eats) _____

Best Place to Define Your Style (clothing, shoes, tattoos, etc.) _____

Best Atmosphere:

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Cleveland Heights – University Heights Board of Education Meeting highlights



DECEMBER 20, 2022 - special meeting
 Board members present were President Malia Lewis, Dan Heintz, James Posch, Jodi Sourini, and Beverly Wright. Also present were Superintendent Elizabeth Kirby and Treasurer Scott Gainer.

JANUARY 3, 2023 - organizational and regular meetings. All board members were present, as were the superintendent and treasurer.

Library board appointment

The board appointed Melissa M. Soto-Schwartz as a library board trustee for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System.

Election of officers

Board President Lewis presided over the nomination and vote for Beverly Wright as board president for 2023. Wright presided over the rest of the organizational meeting, and the regular meeting that followed.

Jodi Sourini was elected to the position of vice president, Dan Heintz was elected to continue as treasurer pro-tem.

Recognitions and awards

Heights High's Academic Challenge Team competed against 11 other schools to place first in the fall National Academic Quiz Tournament, and is scheduled to appear on NewsChannel 5's Nordson-Academic Challenge program in April.

Teachers from the Oxford Elementary School preschool program were recognized for receiving the highest rating from the state.

Noble and Roxboro elementary schools earned bronze recognition from the state of Ohio for work by the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports teams.

Treasurer's report

Treasurer Gainer presented three topics related to goal five of the district's strategic plan:

The ACFR (Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, formerly the CAFR) was completed for fiscal year 2022 and submitted to the Government Financial Officers Association and the Association of School Business Officials. All Ohio districts are required to complete audited financial statements. The CH-UH district chooses to use ACFR because it is more transparent.

Maintenance of effort, as it relates to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), requires that the district demonstrate spending local funds for special education at the same level as the previous year. Many COVID-related impacts must be explained and addressed sufficiently to the Ohio Department of Education. The district met the department's requirements. If the district had not, the department could [have requested] that federal funds be refunded. Malia Lewis drew attention to distributed funds that make a huge impact on the community. For example, [she said,] because the district is a Title 1 school, it receives federal grants to provide students with meals, because students cannot learn if they're hungry. Lewis also observed that IDEA forces districts to continue to support or increase support for students with disabilities. She emphasized the importance of identifying students with disabilities.

Inside millage relates to unvoted mills that are not subject to HB 920. These mills may grow with inflation and change as property values change. Each city controls its own inside millage, which may cause fluctuations in a homeowner's tax bill. The inside millage allocated to the school district is 4.45 mills.

Board comments and announcements

Dan Heintz proposed that public comments be limited to community members only.

Jim Posch recommended considering a policy regarding who can run for school board, i.e., adding a residency requirement, as proposed by the Ohio School Boards Association.

LWV Observer: Rosemarie Fairman.

Documents for all board meetings can be accessed at www.chuh.org/BoardofEducation.aspx. Meetings are livestreamed at www.youtube.com/CHUHSchools, and recorded for later viewing.

Superintendent's report

Superintendent Kirby reported that all eighth-graders attended the college, career, and connections day on Dec. 20 at Cuyahoga Community College.

The district received a \$1-million grant from the state of Ohio for school safety. This will upgrade or provide new building-access doors, security cameras, and other safety equipment.

Treasurer's report

New this year, an audit will be held for retirement contributions.

Title IX expansion

All of the district's board of education members attended the capital conference in Columbus. The state board of education passed a resolution to allow school districts to vote regarding whether they will follow the expansion of Title IX. CH-UH district policies will not change, so they will follow federal guidelines.

School facilities announcements

The district is unable to fund community use of the Heights High pool because the appropriate use of public school funds is for the students—their education, activities, programs, etc. The cities of University Heights and Cleveland Heights would need to be the agents through which a community [swim] program is run.

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion working group is discussing concerns over Monticello Middle School's name.

Dan Heintz commented on the expensive challenges of overhauling HVAC systems, and other necessary upgrades that had been discussed at the previous Lay Facilities Committee meeting.

LWV Observer: Rosemarie Fairman.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

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|---|---|
| <p>Feb. 5 <i>Soul Food Food Truck & a Movie</i>
 Join us for dinner and a movie at 3031 Monticello Blvd. Starting at 2:00 PM</p> | <p>Feb. 12 <i>Experience Reverend Dr. Otis Moss Jr.'s Interactive Biography</i>
 Join us in visiting the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage to see this groundbreaking AI generated interactive biography. meet us at 2929 Richmond Rd. at 2:00 PM for the tour. Tickets start at just \$10</p> |
| <p>Feb. 19 <i>Teach In and Talk on Reparations vs. Jubilee</i>
 What are the differences between reparations and Jubilee?</p> | <p>Feb. 25 <i>FREE Gospel concert ft. Elégie</i>
 A gospel concert on Saturday February 25th at 6:30 PM. FREE and open to the public.</p> |
| <p>Feb. 26 <i>Live Ancestral Listening</i>
 Join us for a special jazz concert at 4 PM FREE and open to the public.</p> | |

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Library earns solid rating for pandemic year 2020

Sheryl Banks

Despite the challenges of COVID lockdowns throughout 2020, the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Library System qualified for a three-star rating from the Index of Public Library Service's publication *Library Journal*.

Heights Libraries was one of only three in Ohio to receive a star designation for 2020—in comparison, Ohio had 27 star libraries in *Library Journal's* rankings for 2019.

Heights Libraries has earned the highest designation, five stars, in 11 out of the 15 years that *Library Journal* has published the ratings. (The library received a four-star rating in

two of the years, and was not rated one year.)

Library Journal reports news about the library world, emphasizing public libraries, and has a nationwide circulation of 100,000.

While customer visits, circulation of physical items, and programming numbers dropped in 2020, the circulation of electronic items, accessible through Heights Libraries' website, rose, including eBooks, audiobooks and streaming services.

"We served our community online," said Nancy Levin, Heights Libraries director. "And while physical circulation went down, we still managed to get items in hands through

continued on page 19

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What's going on at your library?

Coventry Village Branch

1925 Coventry Road, 216-321-3400

Fridays, Feb. 3-24, 10:30 a.m. *Library PALS*. Pre-schoolers are invited to participate in Coventry Village Library's Play and Learn every Friday, at 10:30 a.m., for open-ended play, exploration, socializing, and more.

Lee Road Branch

2345 Lee Road, 216-932-3600

Tuesday, Feb. 14, 6:30 p.m. *Black History Movie Night: MLK/FBI*. In this documentary, award-winning editor and director Sam Pollard lays out a detailed account of the FBI surveillance that dogged Martin Luther King's activism throughout the 1950s and '60s, fueled by the racist and red-baiting paranoia of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. In crafting a rich archival tapestry, featuring some revelatory restored footage of King, Pollard urges us to remember that true American progress is always hard-won.

Noble Neighborhood Branch

2800 Noble Road, 216-291-5665

Tuesdays and Thursdays, Feb. 2-28, 9:30 a.m. to noon *ASPIRESOL Classes*. Formal English language lessons for non-English speakers is provided through Cuyahoga Community College's ASPIRE program. Classes are held twice a week, and are available for speakers at all levels, from beginners to advanced speakers. Students must register for the classes at the Tri-C ASPIRE website, www.tri-c.edu/ohio-options-for-adults/english-for-speakers-of-other-languages.html, or by calling the Delisle Options Center in Cleveland Heights (216-371-7138). The class schedule follows Tri-C's academic calendar for breaks.

University Heights Branch

13866 Cedar Road, 216-321-4700

Tuesday, Feb. 7, 6:30 p.m. *Pop-Tart Candy Houses*. Stop by the library and construct a Pop-Tart House, decorated with icing and candy. This family program is open to children ages 3-12. Registration is required.

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Cleveland Heights - University Heights Public Library Board

Meeting highlights 

DECEMBER 19, 2022

Library board members present were President Gabe Crenshaw, Vice President Max Gerboc, Patti Carlyle, Dana Fluellen, Annette Iwamoto and Tyler McTigue. Not present was Secretary Vikas Turakhia.

Board resolutions

The board:

- Authorized establishment of a lease with Equity Star Realty for temporary Noble library branch space at 2940 Noble Road. In addition, other spaces in the community will be used for library programming.
- Approved the Coventry PEACE Building letters of intent for rental of space. Ten groups are expected to rent space in the building.
- Approved 2023 library-provided vision insurance with VSP insurance. The library pays 100 percent of the premium for single coverage, and 44 percent for family coverage.
- Approved 2023 library-provided dental insurance, replacing Reliance dental with MetLife dental. The library will pay 84 percent of the premium for single coverage, and 65 percent of the premium for family coverage.
- Acknowledged the contributions of Gabe Crenshaw, outgoing board president, who led the board through difficult times.

Personnel report

Three new job vacancies were reported, and two other vacancies were filled. Library staff attended 19 continuing education programs in December, including REI (Racial Equity Institute) groundwater training, REI phase one training, Librarian's Guide to Homelessness, and de-escalation training.

Director's report

The Centers for Families and Children will begin holding office hours in the Lee Road Library Branch on Jan. 1, and continue on Wednesdays for six months as part of a pilot project. The resource specialist is available to serve the public and the staff as needed. Appointments may be made in the adult services department.

It is anticipated that all leases for current tenants in the Coventry PEACE Building will be signed by Dec. 31, 2022. CRESCA Playhouse Square property management will oversee the building. The Coventry PEACE Park fundraising campaign will go public in January.

The Cleveland Heights Planning Commission has approved the Noble library branch renovation project, which [next] will have a final hearing with the Architectural Board of Review. Groundbreaking is anticipated for May 2023.

Strategic Projects Manager Kaela Sweeney and her team secured a \$30,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Education for the One Community Reads project, a community literacy celebration that will be implemented in fall 2023 with the book Let's

Go for a Walk. Programs will take place in all library locations. Additionally, Heights Libraries is participating in another accelerated learning grant project with all of the libraries in Cuyahoga County.

Heights Libraries has secured a virtual-reality and computer-based training opportunity for patrons. Twenty seats at a time will be available for people to enroll in jobs skills training, to earn a U.S. Department of Labor-approved technical apprenticeship certificate. Continuing Education Manager Heather Howler and HKIC (Heights Knowledge and Information Center) staff initiated the project and secured a grant from the State Library of Ohio LSTA (Library Services and Technology Act) program.

The cause of flood damage at the University Heights Library Branch was determined to be a water main break. A sump pump remedy is being explored.

The Lee Road Library Branch made progress [installing] more ADA-friendly signage.

Public service

Two programs had impressive attendance in November. Literacy Cleveland's workshops had 36 attendees. A program in partnership with the Cleveland Heights Historical Society drew 75 attendees.

The library executed 75 passport applications and 88 photos.

The Read with the Librarian program at Noble Neighborhood Library Branch was repeated, with even more success than a previous session. Children enjoyed learning with staff one-on-one, and staff book suggestions were met with enthusiasm. Participants learned how to navigate the library, and find books that appealed to them and were on their reading level.

Cara Byrne, full-time lecturer in the English department at Case Western Reserve University, presented the program, Why Adults Should Read Children's Picture Books. It is available to view on the library's YouTube channel, and has had 50 views to date.

The University Heights Library Branch's Sunday Story Stop has gradually increased its attendance since being reintroduced after COVID closure. It averaged 26 participants for three November programs.

Visitor numbers continue to grow.

In this month's tech blog, Tech Trainer Joe Kaiser shared his experience learning how to use the HKIC/STEAM Lab's 3D printer, [demonstrating how he] created and printed a part for the hood of an old truck. More about his 3D-printing journey can be seen at <https://heightslibrary.org/3d-printing-one-mans-story>.

LWV Observer: Judith Beeler.

Information about the board, board meeting minutes and audio recordings of board meetings can be found at <https://heightslibrary.org/locations/heights-libraries-board>.



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Heights IMD and alumni celebrate 100 years



Heights musicians perform at Severance Hall.

Eve McPherson

On Saturday, Feb. 25, the Cleveland Heights High School Instrumental Music Department (IMD) will celebrate a century of instrumental music at the school.

The evening concert will feature performances by current student ensembles and, on several pieces, alumni will be invited to dust off their instruments and play along. Former band and orchestra directors will also be invited to conduct. The concert will be held in the Heights High auditorium. Community members are encouraged to join the celebration as well.

Current music directors Daniel Heim and Nicholas Marzuola have selected several works for alumni to play on, including Bizet's "Farandole" from *L'Arlésienne Suite No. 2*, and Heights High's Alma Mater. Prior to the concert, there will be a brief rehearsal that alumni can attend.

Selections played by student ensembles will include Alfred Reed's *El Camino Real*, Holst's *Second Suite in F*, and Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*.

The IMD was established in the 1921-22 school year, but celebrations of its centennial milestone were delayed until this year due to COVID-19 precautions.

spoken often in interviews about his memorable experiences playing in Heights High's Symphonic and Jazz bands.

While excellence in music is always a goal of the Heights High IMD, inclusivity is a priority, too. As a public institution, the school's mission is to serve the needs of all students and to offer diverse educational opportunities.

To do so, the high school has an ensemble for everyone, from beginning players to members of the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra. Advanced players audition to play in the Heights High Symphony, Symphonic Winds, Jazz Band, and Jazz Combos. For less advanced players, there are non-audition ensembles: Concert Orchestra, Symphonic Band, and Concert Band.

Founded in 1932, the Heights Band and Orchestra Parent Organization (BOPO) supports the school's mission by fundraising to subsidize student music tours, private lessons, access to musical

instruments, and other needs, so that all Heights High students are able to fully participate in the school's instrumental music programs.

Alumni and community members who would like more information about the Feb. 25 event, including times and locations for the rehearsal and concert, should visit the BOPO website, www.heightsbopo.org. Public domain music scores will be made available as well.

Alumni who are unable to attend the concert, but would like to support IMD programs and students, are encouraged to donate to Heights BOPO in honor of the centennial celebrations. Donations can be made through the BOPO website.

Eve McPherson is the Heights BOPO co-president, and associate professor of music at Kent State Trumbull. As a student, she played violin in the orchestra under Robert Bergantino and Vincent Danner.

The IMD has a storied history of excellence in instrumental music, with many illustrious alumni, such as world-renowned cellist Alicia Weilerstein (class of 1999) and violinist Diana Cohen (class of 1997).

Superbowl champion Jason Kelce (class of 2006) is another notable IMD alumnus who has



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Heights Hardware, sometime in the 1970s, looking like it did in the 1940s and like it does now. I stayed in the apartment above it, with two different sets of residents.

She might have been an angel



SONGS AND STORIES

David Budin

In February 1968, I wasn't exactly aimless; I had goals. I wasn't hopeless; I had dreams and wishes. I wasn't totally homeless; there were a few places where I could stay. But I certainly wasn't grounded, or focused, or even very motivated. Too much had gone wrong.

I was only 18, but my music career had actually shown more promise when I was 16 and 17. It was stalled. I was stalled.

I was staying with a high school friend—one of just two who were still in town—a guy who really was aimless and hopeless, and had even less motivation than I did. But his wife had a job. And they had an apartment right above Heights Hardware on Coventry.

That was the second time I had stayed in that same apartment.

In the summer of '67, my high school girlfriend, and her friend, rented that place and I spent a lot of time there, especially after I was strongly encouraged to leave my parents' home, by one of my parents. My girlfriend and her roommate didn't have that place long because they started college, in other cities, that autumn. Several months after they moved out, my shiftless friend and his wife moved in, coincidentally.

Of all the people I could have stayed with (and there weren't

many), this guy, Tom, was not the influence I needed. Tom and I used to skip school together during high school to write songs together, and practice them for the band we were in. But no more. I had stopped writing songs.

One time, in my last year of high school—I hesitate to say 12th grade, because, by then, I wasn't in any grade—my guidance counselor called me in, again, to tell me, again, how much I was underachieving. I said to him, "You know, a group in New York who's signed to a major label is going to record one of my songs. It sometimes takes songwriters many years to make that happen; but it's happening for me right now, and I'm still in high school. So, I think I'm overachieving."

But by February 1968, I had stopped writing songs. That previous summer and autumn, I had played quite a bit in places including Farragher's, a place on Taylor Road, near Cain Park, that presented national and local folk artists; and La Cave, a University Circle-area folk and rock club that presented mostly nationally known artists, with local openers. But by February 1968, I had stopped playing anywhere.

The members of all three of my bands had all gone off to colleges out of town (except for Tom). My girlfriend, from all the way through high school, and I suddenly broke up in January. So even that was gone. I had no band, no money, no home, no friends, no

continued on page 19

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LIBRARY continued from page 15

curbside services.”
“We’re very proud that we qualified for a solid rating in such a challenging year,” Levin continued. “It truly astonished me, considering we were closed for part of 2020 due to COVID, and had

to limit programming and other services even when we were open, for staff and public safety.”

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

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SONGS & STORIES continued from page 18

girlfriend.
But one mid-February night, I got a call, at Tom’s apartment, from a college friend of my girlfriend who had dropped out of school and returned to Cleveland Heights.

taurant.

I arrived. She arrived. She handed me a \$20 bill. She said, “Go to New York,” and then she ran away. I just watched her disappear into night. I packed what few clothes I had in one guitar case, and my guitar in another guitar case. I called my other friend in town and got him to take me to the airport, that night. Back then, if you were under 21, you could fly stand-by for half of the going rate, which wasn’t a whole lot to begin with.

My girlfriend had introduced us, and I had really disliked her. But I ran into her on Coventry one day and we started talking, and I got a different impression of her. Then we started talking a lot and I began to really like her. Though I knew we’d never have any kind of relationship, other than a friendly one, because she was strange—ethereal and magic, in many ways; extremely empathetic and intuitive; fragile and vulnerable, yet strong and durable in ways, too—and I wasn’t ready to handle all of that.

I left town, and my career began almost immediately. The girl—the friend of the former girlfriend—and I remained friends, from afar, for the rest of her life, which was only 10 more years. And when I think of February, I picture her—standing in front of Irv’s, in the rain, with tears in her eyes, handing me that bill.

So, she called, out of the blue, one night when I was at my lowest. She was crying. I asked why, but she wouldn’t tell me. She only said, “You have to get out of town.”

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

I said I had no place to go. She said it didn’t matter, because I was nowhere already. I said I had no money. She told me to meet her in 20 minutes in front of Irv’s Res-

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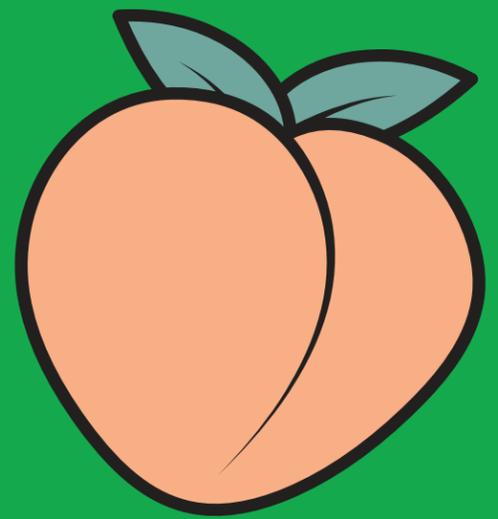
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