



Rosalynn at Tanglefoot Studio



Three 2nd Ward Commissioners



Hosting Bliss for GR



At Pilar's Cafe in Creston



With Kristin Salerno and John Hunting

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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I hope this spring finds you well and that you are enjoying the warmer weather and longer days. To bring you up to date: in January, the Mayor appointed me President of the Commission – a great honor, allowing me to chair the City Commission meetings. Fortunately, the first meeting in January was not when a bat decided to visit us....that occurred in February. If you missed it on the local news, watch it on my website by clicking on the "video" tab. Two new commissioners joined us this year: David LaGrand and Walt Gutowski. We spent our retreat learning about our different styles and how to best communicate and work together effectively. We also shared our vision and priorities for the city. We have much in common...and we agreed that there is much work to do.

I continue to work on issues surrounding parks, greenspace and pools. Members of the Green Grand Rapids process – such as myself - began 18-months of work to improve many public spaces. I have been working over the past year with a group of community members to establish a Friends of Grand Rapids Parks organization, which will focus on improving and enhancing city parks. It is our hope that this organization will be launched sometime this year. I am also working once again with Roosevelt Tillman to secure sponsorships so that we can open all six city pools this summer. The Making Great Waves Campaign has made great progress in raising the needed funds to open the pools. My hope is that once again this summer we will see the pools filled with children swimming, laughing and splashing about.

This year, we sadly said good-bye to two long-time public servants: Phil Belkema, our City Attorney and Terri Hagerty, our City Clerk. These positions are two of four that are appointed by the Commission. After a thorough search and interview process, we appointed Lauri Parks as the next Grand Rapids City Clerk. We're entering our second round of interviews for the City Attorney position with three finalists to choose from. The appointment should be made in May.

My website has also been thoroughly updated – www.blissforgr.org. I also continue to host a public access show called Bliss For GR, which airs on Channel 25 on Wednesday nights at 9pm and on Thursdays at noon. Recent episodes focus on the Grand Rapids Police Department and their strategic plan and the Mayor's Youth Council.

As always, it is a pleasure to serve you as your second ward city commissioner. Please contact me if you have any questions or issues that I can help you with.

With warm regards,
Rosalynn Bliss

Garbage Collection: 456-3232 Housing concerns: 456-3053
Street Lights: 456-3281 Sidewalks: 456-3243 Streets: 456-3232
Special Events: 456-3615 Recycling: 456-4444

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This newsletter was not paid for with Taxpayer dollars

2008 City Cosponsored Events:

The City is cosponsoring a series of events this Spring, Summer and Fall. Even with diminished budgets, the City is committed to supporting neighborhoods and community groups organize successful community events.

Memorial Day Parade: May 30

Festival of the Arts: June 6-8

Rosa Parks Circle Summer

Series "Blues on the Mall":

Wednesdays June 11-August 13

Three Fires Indian Pow Wow:

June 14-15

African American Festival: TBD

Fourth of July Celebration: July 4

Creston Arts and Crafts Fair:

August 2

National Night Out Event:

August 5

Polish Festival: August 22-24

Celebration on the Grand:

September 4-6

Hispanic Festival: September 5-7

Garfield Arts and Crafts Fair:

September 6

The Patriot Day Parade:

September 13

City issues:

2008/09 Budget: Last month the City Commission had its first budget session that included information on current revenues and expenditures. Once again, the City faces growing expenditures and decreasing revenues. We spent time at our first session discussing options and ideas and directing the City Manager to submit a budget that does not rely on contingency funds to be balanced. Some of the ideas for both revenue generation and expenditure cuts included eliminating the jail per diem currently paid to the County, consolidating City Departments, eliminating grants given by the City out of the General Operating Fund, exploring further collaboration with other units of government, and continuing to fight for additional revenue sharing dollars from the state. This will be another important budget season so please let me know your thoughts and priorities. The budget needs to be passed by June to take effect July 1, 2008.

Potholes: As all of you know, this season's weather conditions have had a significant impact on pavement conditions and has resulted in terrible potholes throughout the city. The conditions this year are the worst that the City has encountered in many years. The City received over 1,000 reports of potholes. To address this problem, the City Commission allocated \$100,000 out of the contingency fund to be used to repair potholes. To report potholes call 456-3232.

Rosa Parks Circle: Thank you to the generous sponsors who made ice skating downtown at Rosa Parks Circle available to our community again this winter. Over 27,000 skaters strapped on ice skates this winter and took to the ice to enjoy the beauty of winter. Community partners included Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, Griffins Youth Foundation, Downtown Development Authority, and the Grand Rapids Art Museum.

Individual Circuit Breaker (ICB) Assistance Program:

The City Commission supported the ICB Assistance Program for 2008, which is a program that provides assistance to retail customers who need help paying their water and sewer bills. The City partners with ASCET who administers the program to the community.

New Pedicab Ordinance: The city recently passed an ordinance that would allow pedicab services in Downtown Grand Rapids. Pedicabs, also known as rickshaws, are human powered vehicles usually with one or two seats for carrying passengers short distances. A public hearing was held and the comments received were overwhelming in favor of allowing pedicab services.

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2008 City Cosponsored Events(cont'd):

Grand Valley Indian Pow Wow:
September 6-7

Mexican Independence Day Festival: September 12-14

Eastown Street Fair:
September 20

Veteran's Day Parade: November 11

GR Jaycees Santa Claus Parade:
November 15

City issues:

Green Grand Rapids: Green Grand Rapids is an opportunity to initiate a citywide green infrastructure master planning process that will engage citizens in an extended discussion about what they want, where they want it and how our city can support the development, maintenance and operation of current and future facilities. The Green Grand Rapids process will occur over an 18 month period and actively engage community members at multiple levels. Generous contributions received from four local foundations (Wege Foundation, GR Community Foundation, Frey Foundation, and the Dyer-Ives Foundation) and the DDA gave \$383,000 to the City to assist in completing this process.

Outcomes and projects of the Green Grand Rapids process include:

- Four park specific plans: Joe Taylor, Butterworth Landfill, Ball-Perkins and the Grand River
- Demonstration of combined use facilities (parks and storm water).
- Locations for community gardens and farmers markets
- Cross section for shared use roadways and/or bike lanes
- Recommended routes including greenways, bike paths, pedestrian connections and sidewalks
- Market/economic evaluation of public land to determine community value and/or revenue generation potential

Grand Rapids Housing Commission: The Grand Rapids Housing Commission presented to the Commission a report of their 2007 grants and programs. They reported on nine programs that provide housing and shelter to over 4,000 individuals throughout our community. These are valuable programs, however they reported that there are still over 6,000 families on waiting lists for section 8 housing...indicating a great deal of work that still yet needs to be done.

Grand Rapids Police Department Vision and Plans of the New Leadership Team: Last month Chief Belk and Deputy Chief Farris presented to the City Commission their vision and plans as the new leadership team of the GRPD. They highlighted their goals which include: Youth Initiative, Crime Prevention and Community Service, Staff Development, Organizational Support. They discussed their commitment to Community Oriented Policing, their commitment to facilitating Neighborhood Summits, participation in the Crime Analysis Project, participation in the Violent Crime Initiative, a renewed focus on traffic safety, exploring ways to support the Grand Rapids Public Schools, and a commitment to providing community education. For a copy of their full report, go to www.grcity.us and click on the GRPD.

Rosalynn's Calendar:

City issues:

April 16th – Strong Voices Event

April 18th – KidsSpeak

April 18th –
Fire Fighters Award Banquet

April 21st –
MSU Secchia Center Event

April 23rd –
Open House for the Source

April 23rd
– Dwelling Place Fundraiser

April 24th –
Solid Waste Commission

April 24th –
Girl Scouts Dinner

April 25th –
Coffee with Bliss

April 28-29th –
LISC Conference

April 30th –
Local First Fundraiser

Heritage Square Neighborhood Enterprise Zone (NEZ)

Designation: The City Commission supported the creation of a new NEZ in the Heritage Hill Neighborhood – an area that was identified by the neighborhood and business owners as the area with the most need of revitalization and improvements. The public hearing that was held drew favorable comments from all who spoke. The designation of Heritage Square as a NEZ is consistent with current development efforts, including the planned redevelopment of the property at 345 State Street. Properties located within the boundaries of the NEZ could receive up to 12 year tax incentive for new construction and substantial rehabilitation of residential structures in accordance with the NEZ Act.

Community-Based Stormwater Management Plan: The City of Grand Rapids entered into a partnership with the West Michigan Environmental Action Council (WMEAC) to develop a community based stormwater master plan for the City. WMEAC is recognized as a national expert in the field of stormwater management and environmental action and specializes in environmental education. The process is expected to take up to 12 months to complete.

Community Development Block Grants Funding

Recommendations: The Community Development Department presented the FY 2009 CDBG funding recommendations to the City Commission. Unfortunately once again, the FY 2009 CDBG entitlements decreased which was coupled by reductions in program income and funds returned for programming. The funding process was open this year, resulting in additional funding requests, however due to the decreased availability of funding, some requests were not funded and others were reduced. To see a full list of the funding recommendations that will be voted on in April, go to the www.grcity.us and click on Community Development.

Calendar continued on next page

Rosalynn's Calendar:

May 2008

May 6th – Kent Hills Elementary
School Groundbreaking

May 6th –
Service to Children Awards

May 7th –
Creston Neighborhood
Association Art Show Event

May 8th –
Solid Waste Commission

May 8th –
Michigan Women's
Foundation Annual Dinner

May 9th –
City School Liaison Meeting

May 14th –
Sister City Event

May 21st –
Civil Rights Dinner

May 27th –
Coffee with Bliss

City Boards and Commissions – how to get involved:

The City has a number of Boards and Commissions comprised of citizens that discuss critical issues, examine ideas, make decisions and make recommendations to the City and the City Commission. They meet at various times throughout the month and each has a different level of responsibility. Below is a list of current vacancies. If you are interested in applying to one of the positions below, contact the City Clerk's Office at 456-3004.

City Board and Commission Current Vacancy List:

- Automobile Parking Commission
- Cable Television Advisory Forum
- Community Relations Commission
- Civil Service Board
- Downtown Improvement District
- Grand Rapids Historical Commission
- Housing Appeal Board
- Housing Rehabilitation Appeals Board
- Income Tax Board of Review
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
- Tax Increment Finance Authority