



# Blissbits

[www.blissforgr.org](http://www.blissforgr.org)

Greetings friends and neighbors,

**What you see above demonstrates how much 2nd Ward citizens care about their city and who represents them!** After Commissioner LaGrand resigned in January to run for State Senate, we began accepting applications to fill the vacant seat. Part of the process included this Commission meeting at Kent Hills elementary, giving supporters of the four finalists (including: Ruth Kelly, Michael Booker, Eric Foster, and Anna Rapa) a chance to voice their opinion. Thank you to everyone who attended! The next opportunity for public input is a Candidate Forum on March 22 at 7pm at Wealthy Theater; I hope to see you there. After the Community Forum, the Commission will complete second round interviews and then cast our votes. Our plan is to have the swearing-in ceremony in April, which will require the new Commissioner to jump right into 2011 budget discussions.

This month we will also begin our 2010/2011 budget discussion. We have a difficult year ahead as we work to transform City government and how services are provided. In February we struggled with the difficult discussion about placing an income tax increase on the ballot on May 4th. I will be working closely with my colleagues, community members and city staff to make fiscally sustainable changes and keep our City a great place to live. I welcome your thoughts and input and have posted survey questions about the budget to my website. I also welcome you to contact me directly to share your thoughts and opinions. Many people came out to attend community budget meetings, providing the City Commission with many recommendations. All input from the community budget meetings can be found at the City's website at [www.grcity.us](http://www.grcity.us). On the City's website you will also find information on the current budget, answers to frequently asked questions and a summary of our 12 point plan to transform City government.

These are challenging times that we face, however I am confident that together we can find solutions that maintain our quality of life in our City. If you have questions, thoughts, ideas or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.



Honored to be serving you,

Com. Rosalynn Bliss  
City of G.R. 300 Monroe NW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503



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**Tax Questions: 456-3081**

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This newsletter was not paid for with Taxpayer dollars

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[www.inthe616.com](http://www.inthe616.com)

## City Issues and Updates:

### Google Fiber:

Google recently announced that it is planning to launch an experiment that they hope will make Internet access better and faster for everyone. They plan to test ultra-high speed broadband networks in one or more trial cities across the country. The ultra-high speed broadband networks will deliver Internet speeds more than 100 times faster than what most Americans have access to today, over 1 gigabit per second, fiber-to-the-home connections. They will offer service at a competitive price to at least 50,000 and potentially up to 500,000 people. The City of Grand Rapids has completed the application and I ask that you consider supporting our request. You can do this by going to <http://www.google.com/appserve/fiberrfi/public/options>. Simply click on the Blue Nominate your community button and complete the form. Residents have until March 26, 2010 to complete the information. You can also visit [www.inthe616.com](http://www.inthe616.com)

### Consolidating Voting Precincts:

On Tuesday, January 26, 2010, the City Commission approved an ordinance change recommended by the City of Grand Rapids Election Commission that consolidated 34 precincts into 17 precincts. The consolidation subsequently reduced the total number of precincts in the City of Grand Rapids from 100 to 83.

This consolidation eliminated six (6) precincts in the First Ward, six (6) precincts in the Second Ward, and five (5) precincts in the Third Ward. As a result, there will be a cost savings through the reduction of staffing, precinct supplies, and other election preparation functions. All voters impacted by this change have been notified by the City Clerk. If you have any questions, please contact the City at 456-3883..

### Coffees with Bliss:

Wednesday, March 17th at 7:30am at Marie Catrubs on Lake and Diamond

Monday, April 26th at Noon at Graydon's Crossing on Plainfield Ave

Tuesday, May 18th at 5pm at the Electric Cheetah on Wealthy Street

Wednesday, June 23rd at 7:30am at Wealthy Street Bakery

Monday, July 19th at Noon at Global Infusion on Diamond

### Rosalynn (center) at Justice Foundation Fundraiser





Reading at Cesar Chavez El.  
for Literacy Awareness Day

## City Issues and Updates:

### **Kent County Jail Renovations:**

On January 27th I attended a neighborhood meeting to discuss the upcoming construction at the Kent County Jail. The renovations proposed will include razing and replacing the 1950's and 1970's facilities, with the intent to improve safety of inmates and staff. The design features replacing 536 beds, creating flexibility in bunking, providing direct supervision of housing pods, build energy efficient systems, and video visitation. The construction will begin in May 2010 and conclude September 2012.

### **Improvements to the Farmer's Market Office:**

After years of seeking funding for improvements to the Farmer's Market, I am happy to inform you that the City secured funding from the CDBG Recovery funds to make improvements to the Farmer's Market Office. This will include replacing the furnace, electrical service, windows, roof and fixing brick on the outside.

### **City Layoffs:**

As of January 25, 2010, the City demoted 57 employees, eliminated 137 positions and laid off 45 employees. This was done in order to balance a mid-year budget deficit.

### **Community Budget Suggestions:**

On February 16, 2010 the City Commission reviewed all of the recommendations made by citizens during the Community Budget Meetings. Citizens provided over 1,000 suggestions. Many of the suggestions have already been done, many we are currently working on, many are good ideas that we are currently exploring, some will take time to do, and some are not feasible due to State or Federal law restrictions. The entire list of recommendations and a break down/summary of suggestions can be found on the City's website.

### **2009 GRFD Prevention and Response Summary:**

The Grand Rapids Fire Department provides a number of important services to our community including: saving lives and minimizing property damage through fire suppression, providing pre-hospital emergency medical service, preparing for WMD and terrorist incidents, providing rescue services for all types of accidents, enforcing International Code Council to ensure safe buildings, conducting fire safety and public health presentations and events, and investigating the cause and origins of fires. There are currently 204 fire department personnel at the GRFD. In 2009, there were a total of 18,709 incidents that the GRFD responded to.

## **CURRENT BOARD AND COMMISSION VACANCIES:**

**Cable Television Advisory Forum**

**Downtown Improvement  
District Board**

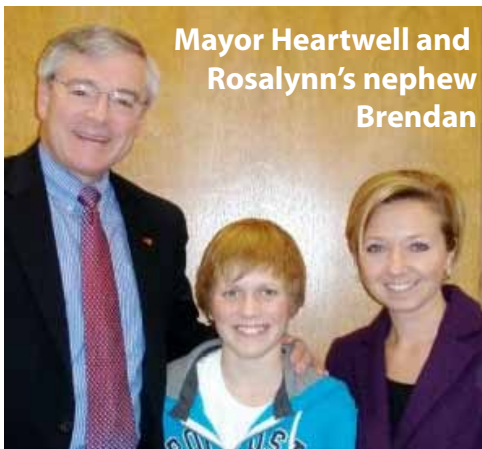
**Tax Increment Finance Authority**

**If you're interested in serving,  
please visit [www.grcity.us](http://www.grcity.us)  
to fill out an application.  
Feel free to contact me if you  
have any questions. We need you!**

Commissioner Rosalynn Bliss City of Grand Rapids 300 Monroe NW Grand Rapids, MI 49503

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Mayor Heartwell and  
Rosalynn's nephew  
Brendan

Some of the many great events  
in GR in the next few months

**Cesar Chavez Social Justice  
March 31st**

**GR Founding Day Parade – May 1st**

**Earth Day – May 1st**

**River Bank Run – May 8th**

**I LOVE GR Parks II – May 15th**

**Memorial Day Parade – May 29th**

**Festival of the Arts – June 4th – 6th**

**Blues on the Mall – Wednesdays  
from June 9th to August 11th**

**Eastown Bizarre Bazaar – June 12th**

**Sidewalk Chalk Flood – June 13th**

**Founders Fest – June 19th**

## City Issues and Updates:

### **Crime in Grand Rapids in 2009:**

Last month the GRPD shared their data from the Uniform Crime Report. The Uniform Crime Report collects data on a number of types of offenses and these are broken down into Part 1 and Part 2 Offenses. The GRPD reports crime information to the State of Michigan each month. The State then passes the data on to the FBI for inclusion in the annual Crime in the US Report. This report indicates that for 2009, there were a total of 10,502 Part 1 Offenses, with the highest number being larceny (6,005) and burglary (2,430) and 10,540 Part 2 Offenses with the highest number being non-aggravated assault (3,812), vandalism (2,436) and narcotics laws (1,770). For a copy of the full report, you can go to the City's website and click on GRPD.

### **MDOT'S FIX ON I-196**

Preliminary work is already underway on the Michigan Department of Transportation's (MDOT) \$40 million reconstruction/widening of approximately 1.75 miles of I-196 in Grand Rapids from the Grand River bridge to Fuller Avenue. Starting April 12, 2010 and into August 2010, eastbound and westbound I-196 traffic will have local access to the College Avenue interchange, but no through-traffic beyond College Avenue. During Stage 2 of the project, which extends from August through November 2010, I-196 through-traffic will resume.

### **2010 Census:**

The City of Grand Rapids has established a Complete Count Committee (CCC) to aid the United States Census Bureau in achieving an accurate and efficient count of our community's population. The City recognizes the importance of the Census and understands the count of every Grand Rapids citizen is paramount for a number of reasons. The outcome of the census will determine Grand Rapids' eligibility for a plethora of funds, services and awards. Plus, quantifying the population helps the City better understand how it is attracting and preserving human capital as well as the trends of our financial, religious and ethnic demographics. These are all indicators of how robust and diverse our community is becoming.



## City Issues and Updates:

### **Congratulations to Chief Laura Knapp:**

On December 15, 2009, Greg Sundstrom named Laura Knapp as the City's Fire Chief. Chief Knapp is the first female Fire Chief in the City's history. Chief Knapp has been with the Fire Department since 1984. Her career path has included a series of progressive promotions and responsibilities as she worked her way from firefighter to the rank of Battalion Chief in 1999, Deputy Chief in 2004, Acting Fire Chief in July 2009 and now Fire Chief. Congratulations Chief Knapp. I am grateful to have you leading our Fire Department during these difficult times.



### **Electric Cheetah on Wealthy Street:**

The City Commission supported the request by the Electric Cheetah to obtain a liquor license, after it was supported and approved by the Uptown CID. The request now goes to Lansing for final approval.

### **Federal Building/Old Post Office:**

The City Commission recently supported a request to allocate Recovery Zone Financing Bonds to the Economic Development Corporation for the Old Post Office Project. This building is slated to be renovated to be used by Ferris State University as classrooms, galleries, offices and other university related uses. I am excited to see this incredible building back in use and restored.

### **Approval of Two Area Specific Plans:**

The City Commission recently approved the Belknap Neighborhood Area Specific Plan (ASP) Amendment to the 2002 Grand Rapids Master Plan. The Belknap Neighborhood ASP is intended to serve as a guide for future investment, rehabilitation and redevelopment within the neighborhood. The ASP provides specific recommendations for use and development character of improvements within the neighborhood and was created by neighborhood residents and stakeholders. The City Commission also approved the Monroe North ASP, which is intended to guide land use, development and public improvements within the district. It provides recommendations for land use, circulation, parking and development character that build and expand on the objectives and policies of the Grand Rapids Master Plan.



## **Combining the EDC and Brownfield:**

Recently the City Commission approved combining the Board of Directors of the Economic Development Corporation of the City of Grand Rapids and the Board of Directors of the City of Grand Rapids Brownfield Redevelopment Authority as these two economic development boards have similar missions and objectives.

## **ARRA Justice Assistance Grant Funds:**

Last month the City Commission approved the designation of \$347,364 of ARRA JAG funds to support community based crime prevention activities in partnership with neighborhood associations. The goal of the Community based Crime Prevention Program is to reduce crime and increase public safety. Using a community organizing model, crime prevention organizers actively work with neighbors to identify problems, find resources to help resolve problems, develop action plans and implement plans. Eleven neighborhood associations received funding.

## **Public Hearing for the FY 2011 Consolidated Housing and Community Development Annual Action Plan:**

A public hearing has been set for March 23rd to hear citizen comments on funding recommendations for the City of Grand Rapids Neighborhood Investment Plan and Emergency Solutions Grants program under the Consolidated Housing and Community Development Annual Action Plan. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires submission of an Annual Action Plan that serves as a planning document for CDBG, HOME and ESG programs.

## **May 4th Election Ballot Proposals:**

After much debate, discussion and compromise the City Commission voted to put two questions before the voters on May 4th. One related to a Charter language amendment that would allow the City to eliminate the requirement that eight hours shall constitute a day's work for all City employees and contractors. This would allow the City to have more flexibility and explore cost saving options such as move to a work week with fewer than 40 hours or move from a 5 day work week to a 4 day work week. The other proposal is related to a 5 year income tax increase, which would aid in solving the City's short term financial crisis while providing time to make long-term sustainable changes. The following ballot questions/proposals will be placed before the electorate for their adoption or rejection on May 4th.

Uniform City Income Tax Increase: Shall Ordinance No. 2010-07, an amendment to the Uniform City Income Tax Ordinance, which increases the annual rate of tax on corporations and resident individuals from 1.3% to 1.5% and on non-resident individuals from .65% to .75% effective July 1, 2010, a portion of which shall be spent on police and fire services, and which increase shall automatically expire on June 30, 2015 be approved? YES ( ) or NO ( )

PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO TITLE XVIII, SECTION 22 (EIGHT HOURS TO CONSTITUTE A DAY'S WORK) OF THE CHARTER OF THE CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS. The purpose of this amendment is to eliminate the City Charter requirement that eight hours shall constitute a day's work for City employees (other than firefighters, police officers, and election officials), and for employees of contractors while engaged on municipal contract work, and that all contracts for municipal contract work shall contain such a provision. Eliminating this requirement would permit the City to establish the length of the work day for its employees and contractors at more or less than eight hours per day. Yes ( ) No ( )