A City of Valparaiso Quarterly Newsletter

## City Works to Upgrade Neighborhoods

#### Property maintenance efforts are making a positive difference

Buildings and structures that are unsafe, ill maintained or abandoned do not make good neighbors. To address these properties, the City of Valparaiso is working to enhance code enforcement efforts and improve neighborhoods. "This past year, we've expanded efforts in enforcing building codes to improve living conditions, promote stable

neighborhoods and build community pride," said Valparaiso Mayor Matt Murphy. "We're pleased that we've seen a lot of cooperation and shared responsibility with property owners themselves, making neighborhoods the real winners," he said.

Since ramping up enforcement of the City's Unsafe Building Ordinance, Property Maintenance Ordinance,



The City of Valparaiso has ramped up efforts to enforce building codes and ordinances, removing unsafe buildings and improving neighborhoods.

and Rental Housing Ordinance in 2020, the city has received orders and agreements through the Board of Public Works and Safety that resulted in demolition of structures on 10 unsafe or unsightly properties – with the majority demolished by the property owners. Two additional structures are scheduled for demolition in early 2021.

"The impact of our property maintenance efforts has made a dramatic and positive difference," said Valparaiso Building Commissioner Vicki Thrasher. "Property owners, neighbors and the Board of Works have been very receptive, and we've been able to collectively improve spaces where we once saw dilapidated, unsafe and unsightly structures," she said.

"We're glad to be working with property owners as we want residents to live in safe and comfortable spaces," she said. Over the past year, the City has worked with the owners of 18 additional properties to improve the safety, structural integrity and appearance of their homes or businesses. "We're not kicking people out

of their homes but

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The City of Valparaiso is launching a new Strategic Planning process and we're interested in learning what YOU think about Valpo. There are two ways to get involved:

- 1. Take a 6-question survey and share your thoughts. OR
- 2. Take part in a one-hour Zoom session. We've scheduled 5 opportunities at different times and days of the week.

To access the survey and find links to the Zoom sessions, which begin Feb. 15, 2021, **visit Valpo.us** and click on the "Strategic Plan – Get Involved" link at the top of the page.

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working with them. We've connected the owners of two of these properties with Home Team Valpo to assist them with their housing challenges," she said. For more information on Home Team Valpo, the city-inspired nonprofit organization, see the story in this issue of City Talk.

#### **COLLECTION BOXES**

Freestanding collection boxes are another area that the City focused on to improve both property management and appearance. "While the idea of collecting donations is a good one, these collection boxes often invited the dumping of trash and some were not maintained by any organization. In fact, many of the boxes were placed without the property owner's permission," said Thrasher.

The City of Valparaiso adopted a new ordinance regulating collection boxes in 2019. Over the past year, enforcement efforts require that collection boxes have a permit, be maintained regularly, constructed of a durable material, clearly marked and placed in appropriate spots. The effort resulted in the removal of dozens of unsightly boxes by property owners and by Valparaiso Public Works. Ultimately, the remaining collection boxes are properly permitted and maintained.



As part of enhanced code enforcement efforts, the City of Valparaiso has worked to remove unsightly donation collection boxes that invited the dumping of trash throughout the city. Remaining boxes require a permit and must be maintained regularly, constructed of a durable material, clearly marked and placed in appropriate spots.



Student volunteers from Valparaiso Alternative Learning Experience recently assisted a Valparaiso homeowner in cleaning up their property as part of Home Team Valpo. One of Mayor Murphy's key initiatives, Home Team Valpo is a city-inspired and volunteer-driven nonprofit organization created to assist Valparaiso homeowners in

### Home Team Valpo

# New nonprofit helps property owners to maintain their spaces

The City of Valparaiso has helped launch a new nonprofit organization, created to assist qualifying homeowners in maintaining their homes. "Together, we recognized a need to help people make their homes safer, more comfortable, more accessible. Home Team Valpo was born out of that need and the City of Valparaiso is very pleased to help launch this effort, as one of my key initiatives," said Valparaiso Mayor Matt Murphy.

In partnership with Habitat for Humanity of Porter County, Home Team Valpo is city- inspired and volunteer-driven. Since its inception in September, 2020, Home Team Valpo has helped 10 homeowners with projects from clean-up and yard maintenance to assessment of repairs needed and scheduling for completion of projects with local contractors and skilled craftsmen.

To initiate Home Team Valpo, the City of Valparaiso is providing seed funds by offering a dollar-for-dollar matching grant, up to \$50,000. Other donors include charter partners (a three-year commitment) Abonmarche, Inc.; Kent Heating & Cooling, Inc.; NISOURCE Foundation, Porter County Community Foundation, Smith Ready Mix, Inc.; Urschel GIVES, Valuation Services, Inc., plus Bucher Technologies, Kevin Cornett, Von Tobel Lumber, Who's Your Handyman and a number of anonymous donors.

#### **LEARN MORE ABOUT**

Home Team Valpo is seeking homeowners who need work



completed, skilled and unskilled workers to volunteer their time, plus financial contributions and donations of new building materials. To learn how to get involved, visit HomeTeamValpo.org.

## Neighborhood Improvement Grants

College Hill Neighborhood Association received a 2020 Neighborhood Grant to add a new bus shelter on Union Street. The neighborhood plans to add

some artwork and design by wrapping the shelter this spring. While this grant builds neighborhood

pride, it serves the entire community and is located conveniently near the food pantry.

Jessee-Pifer Neighborhood recently completed the work from a 2019
Neighborhood Grant to enhance its nearby park. Neighbors and visitors can enjoy new fencing, signage, and a resurfaced basketball court with a new hoop and stripes for basketball, hopscotch, 4-square and pickleball.

The Neighborhood Improvement grant program was created to encourage neighborhood unity and support community improvements. The City awarded \$132, 000 in grants for 2020. The 2021 grant cycle begins in March. To learn how to apply, visit the Community Engagement page at Valpo.us or contact Maggie Clifton at (219) 462-1161.

Hilltop Neighborhood House





# Shop Local. Dine Local. Get Your Rally Cap

To support Valparaiso businesses, Valparaiso Events has introduced an incentive to shop and dine in Valparaiso: Choose Valpo and get a free limited-edition rally cap to show your support. "The rally cap challenge is another way

for us to rally and Lift Up Valpo. Wearing our caps shares a message of pride in our community," said Tina St. Aubin, Executive Director for Valparaiso Events.

Here's how to get your FREE rally cap:

- Make a purchase in Valparaiso! Take a photo and tag Valparaiso Events on Facebook or Instagram (they will connect with you so you can claim your cap.) Or exchange your local receipt for a Rally Cap at Valparaiso Events, 150 W. Lincolnway, Suite 1006
- 2. Wear your Rally Cap with pride, showing your support for Valparaiso businesses.

For more information, visit ValparaisoEvents.com/rally-cap.

# citytalk



Dear Neighbors,

Welcome 2021! We're entering a new year with new optimism as vaccinations are arriving and we're navigating COVID with more information and resources. We thank the entire community for working together through the past year. We've persevered, and we have much to show for it

In this issue of City Talk, we share updates of increased code enforcement efforts over the past year. Working with property owners, we're improving neighborhoods by upgrading properties or removing buildings beyond repair. We're hearing lots of gratitude from neighbors who once looked out on unsafe or unsightly spaces.

We're pleased that 2020 was a record year for paving in Valparaiso. In the first year of a new administration, amid a pandemic, we were able to pave nearly 12 miles of roadway in Valparaiso. And we introduced a number of safety measures, including speed humps – a new way of calming traffic and adding safety. We're off to a great start for 2021 with a Community Crossings grant for more roadway improvements.

We've moved forward with a brand-new nonprofit to help homeowners, we're supporting local businesses with a Rally Cap promotion and we're working on projects to bring new housing options and new businesses to Valparaiso.

Thank you for working together, Valparaiso!

Sincerely,

Marther R. Wursh Mayor Matt Murphy

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## Valparaiso Awarded Roadway Grant

The City of Valparaiso has been awarded a new Community Crossings Grant from the Indiana Department of Transportation, announced Mayor Matt Murphy. This 50/50 matching grant will support the reconstruction of a section of Eisenhower Avenue, including concrete curbs, storm sewer upgrades and the installation of sidewalks. "We're very pleased to receive this additional funding and be able to extend roadway improvements into neighborhoods," said City Engineer Mike Jabo.

"We're continuing to seek all available funding and road-extending techniques, stretching our budgets to do the maximum possible each year," said Murphy. With the help of grant funding, the City of Valparaiso was able to pave nearly 12 miles of roadway in 2020. "It was gratifying to come in under budget in 2020, allowing us to add a series of projects and traffic-calming features," said Murphy.

The Community Crossings grant will support improvements on Eisenhower Avenue from 720 feet west of Crockett Avenue to Sturdy Road, for a length of 1,300 feet. The project is expected to cost \$845,000, with the Community Crossings grant funding \$422,000. Work is expected to begin in May or June 2021.

Additional roadway projects will be announced early in 2021, according to Jabo. "We are optimistic that we will receive an additional Community Crossings grant and 2021 has the potential to be another very good year for Valparaiso roadways," he said.

The City of Valparaiso is off to a good start for 2021 with a Community Crossings grant to support reconstruction of a section of Eisenhower Avenue, including concrete curbs, storm sewer upgrades and the installation of sidewalks. With the help of grant funding, the City was able to pave nearly 12 miles of roadway in 2020 – a new record.





# Safety First: Speed Humps

Speed humps are a new safety tool the City of Valparaiso is introducing for traffic calming. The humps are a raised strip with a sloped approach and a flat top. The design makes it possible for snowplows and emergency vehicles to navigate over them, while still serving to slow traffic. So far, the City has installed four speed humps to gauge their benefit and may expand their use if proven effective.

#### Neighborhood Note

Be a good neighbor and avoid parking over sidewalks and pathways. Not only does an ordinance prohibit parking over sidewalks and pathways, but your walking, running and stroller-pushing neighbors will thank you.