



# The Rockhill Times

## President's Letter

WINTER 2024

### The ROCKHILL ROCKETTES?

By Gerry Carlson  
carlsonmc@gmail.com

Can you imagine, back in the day, two eye-high-kickin' chorus lines of a dozen Rockhill grannies dancing down Broadway, six abreast, in a strut-kick cancan leading the St. Patrick's Day Parade, followed right behind by the Marching Cobras Drill Team struggling to keep up? What a sight that would have been! Can you imagine? Well, it may not have happened, I'm just not sure, but it could have. What's to stop one of you out there from organizing such a group, or any other type of group for that matter?

In response to the August 22 questionnaire that I sent out, several people had concerns that we have insufficient community interactions available within Rockhill. One wrote, "I wish there were more neighborhood activities and unity (block parties, holiday events, Facebook groups, kids' playgroups)." Another wrote that he was concerned about, "maintaining, even somehow increasing, awareness of the uniqueness of our neighborhood in those coming into Rockhill. The picnic, annual meeting, and newsletter aren't enough. [ ] We need clubs, seasonal activities, neighborhood outings, neighborhood charitable and civic projects to acquaint and unite neighbors." I've heard similar desires from several other residents over the years. All these folks may well be onto something. J.C. Nichols, the innovative residential community developer, actually hired people specifically to establish activities involving the residents of his new

neighborhoods, often even organizing competitions among neighborhoods. The resultant increase in community spirit kept more residents happy in their neighborhood and, of course, in their homes (1).

Although organized activities can certainly be organized from the top down, à la Nichols, they can equally well, if not better, be organized from the bottom up by passionate, interested, invested residents. During my time in Rockhill there have been book clubs, investment clubs, a mahjong group, a social dancing group, and our current garden club, all organized from the bottom up. So, if you'd like to see a particular organized activity started in Rockhill, go for it! There is nothing to hold you back, as long as the activity is legal and you can spur enough interest to get others to join in. Your group does not need to be Board-sanctioned.

What can the Board do to help get your new organization up and running? First, and foremost, we can broadcast to the entire Rockhill Community your new opportunity for interactions with neighboring, like-minded people. We can also publish information about your organization in *The Rockhill Times* and on our website. So, you will have ample opportunities to publicize your new group. All that awaits is your passion and a plan. Go forth remembering the inescapable reality in Jean-Paul Sartre's observation that, "only actions determine intentions" (2).

1. Worley, William S., *J.C. Nichols and the Shaping of Kansas City*, University of Missouri Press, p. 264ff (1990).

2. *No Exit* (1944).

## IT'S JANUARY – TIME FOR RHA DUES

You will be receiving an invoice for Rockhill Homes Association annual dues in the next few days. Please do your part to help keep our neighborhood safe, beautiful and connected by promptly sending payment to our faithful RHA treasurer, Barry Nickell. Your dues help keep Rockhill safe because 90% of our dues fund our private security service, the North Kansas City Bureau of Investigation. NKCBI provides regular “drive through” patrols, day and night, to discourage unlawful behavior. It also offers services to neighbors who would like to have their home more closely monitored while vacationing, safety and security tips, and information about safety and security issues around the city.

Our dues also help keep Rockhill beautiful by providing funds to maintain the park spaces on the eastern entrance to our neighborhood on Brush Creek and the “pocket park” at Kenwood and 45<sup>th</sup> Street. Further, we are helped in staying connected with each other because our dues pay the expenses for our all neighborhood annual meeting in May and our wonderful neighborhood picnic each fall.

The RHA Board is careful how the dues are spent. Our security service expenses have actually declined by switching to NKCBI. As a result, even during a time when many expenses are going up, our annual dues remain at \$325 and have remained at that amount for more than five years!

### “SMALL TOWN NEWS”

*By Galen Mussman*

Todi Hughes was the RHA Welcome Chair when Jeffie and I moved to Rockhill in 2008. Anybody who knows Todi will tell you what a great person she is. She has also lived most of her life in Rockhill, so it will come as no surprise that she made a terrific Welcome Chair. I'll never forget what she told us about life in Rockhill, “You haven't just moved into a neighborhood, you've moved into a small town.” She nailed it.

When the Board hires a security company to patrol our neighborhood, the security company wants to know the geographical boundaries that make up Rockhill. That's technically our “neighborhood;” but what makes Rockhill special is that within those boundaries people know and care about each other. They're interested in what's going on in the lives of the people around them.

That's why we're going to see who is interested in contributing to “Small Town News.” Starting with the Spring Edition, I will send out an invitation a few weeks before each quarterly edition of the Rockhill Times encouraging anyone who has news they'd like to share to let me know: special anniversary or birthday, professional accomplishments, fun photos from a hobby or travel , , , you get the idea. I look forward to hearing from you.

### SO THIS IS KCMO'S PUBIC ENGAGEMENT?

*By Jim Wanser*

The City of Kansas City has a significant problem with its public engagement process. It simply doesn't work. It creates mistrust of our city government and fosters division among stakeholders. Our recent interaction with Public Works and the goal of connecting the Gillham Track and Trolley Track Connector project has repeatedly exposed the dysfunction. It seems that various departments within the City see the public engagement process as a perfunctory duty that is burdensome with little value for the goals that *they themselves* have identified. It has resulted in many missed opportunities for cross learning among diverse stakeholders, fostered mistrust of City government, and been an impediment for better collective outcomes.

Most agree that bike lanes are a progressive asset for the City and address a variety of needs for contemporary urban environments, and yet, it seems that with each phase that is rolled out, there is disruptive negative controversy. Something that should be celebrated as a progressive positive development in our City, costing millions, moves forward with a negative polarizing

cloud. Even the leadership of BikeWalk KC recently reflected that Kansas City "keeps shooting itself in the foot" as it develops bike lanes throughout the City. We have seen it on the Westside, Historic Northeast and the Eastside. In Rockhill we have experienced a lack of public notice, dismissal of our input, public meetings that were orchestrated to control and restrict the process and no feedback for our participation.

The encouraging news is that others throughout the City have also expressed their frustration with both the lack and quality of public engagement in Kansas City. The August 2023 Ordinance 230613, which mandates public engagement with neighborhood associations before bike lanes are installed, is a step in the right direction. In addition, Resolution 230998 was passed by the City Council on December 7, 2023 directing City Manager Platt to develop a Public Engagement Plan for the City, reporting back to the Council in 90 days. It is a step in the right direction and we hope that it significantly improves the process of public engagement in Kansas City.

## **UPDATE ON JANUARY 4 BIKE PATH MEETING**

*By Gerald Carlson*

In my December 23 email to you I informed you that the city was hosting a meeting at the Kauffman Foundation on January 4 ostensibly to gain additional information from us on the Gillham Track and Trolley Track Trail Connector project. The hosts of the meeting were Bailey Waters, Chief Mobility Officer at KCMO, and Jason Waldron, Transportation Director. In a very short introduction, Ms. Waters gave the background of the project from the city's perspective and showed a street map indicating which streets were to be discussed, excluding Harrison. As you may recall, that single block of Harrison connects the end of the Gillham trail to Cleaver Blvd., the route that our neighborhood supports. When audience hands were raised to ask questions, Mr. Waldron indicated that no questions would be taken. This comment

elicited questions and comments from the audience that were largely ignored. The formal part of the meeting then ended, and the remainder of the meeting was essentially a redux of the first meeting on September 8 at the Nelson-Atkins Museum during which alternative options for a connector were presented on separate poster boards manned by city workers who tried to explain them. Although some options to modify Cleaver were presented, they were in addition to finishing the connector path on Gillham West – Rockhill Road and included such things as added concrete curbs or low concrete walls on Cleaver. As with the September 8 meeting, no attempt was made, except for asking for respondents' zip codes on a short, vague questionnaire, to distinguish among Rockhill residents, bicyclists and the general public, despite City Ordinance 230613 mandating that "collaboration with and support from **neighborhood associations** is a critical step prior to the installation" of bike lanes.

The Rockhill Homes Association, including its Board, was well-represented at this meeting and our residents spoke with many of the presenters to gain additional information. The Board met on January 9 and discussed their conclusions from the meeting. To summarize their consensus, they are frustrated that the city remains adamant on continuing the Gillham West – Rockhill Road connector without public explanation or justification; that the process for installing bike lanes approved by the city has not been followed at all in this case; and that the overwhelming petitioned desires of the only residential neighborhood between the two bike paths to be connected continue to be totally ignored without public explanation or justification. The Board decided to continue working to achieve the original goals of the Rockhill Homes Association related to this project, namely to remove the lines already painted for the Gillham West – Rockhill Road connector and to combine traffic-calming measures with a bike path on Emanuel Cleaver II Boulevard, probably connected via Harrison to the Gillham Track. Our position is detailed fully in the following article by Jim Wanser entitled "Our Position Remains the Same."

It is not too late to advocate for this position with the city officials listed in my December 23 email. In addition to those listed, you might also want to include:

Michael Shaw, Public Works Director KCMO  
[michael.shaw@kcmo.org](mailto:michael.shaw@kcmo.org)

Eric Rogers, Executive Director BikeWalkKC  
[eric.rogers@bikewalkkc.org](mailto:eric.rogers@bikewalkkc.org)

Michael Kelley, Policy Director BikeWalkKC  
[michael.kelley@bikewalkkc.org](mailto:michael.kelley@bikewalkkc.org)

## **OUR POSITION REMAINS THE SAME**

*By Jim Wanser*

With all the changes in the conversation with the City, the Rockhill Board would like to share our original position of support for traffic calming and bike lanes to connect the Gillham/Harrison leg to the Trolley Trail. Our endorsement and preferences were submitted to the City in May of 2023 and remain unchanged. We appreciate your support.

### ***Bike Lanes/Traffic Calming from Gillham-Harrison to Trolley Trail***

The project has been planned and budgeted by Public Works

GOAL for Cleaver between Rockhill and Troost: Safe functional bike lanes. One lane of traffic in each direction with a turn lane in the center.

1. Bike lanes on Cleaver should be protected and safe versus unprotected.
2. Both bike lanes on one side of the street versus two sides. Less stuff: bollards, cement blocks, signage. More affordable for City and easier to maintain.
3. Bike lanes on the North side of the street. The safest route off of and onto Harrison. Bikes don't need to cross Cleaver at Harrison. They will go to an intersection. Fewer houses on the North side and they are elevated. The North side has more access to parking on side streets. Parking is needed on the South side of Cleaver.
4. Parking lane on the South side of Cleaver that is designated with concrete bump outs,

barriers or bollards so that it can't be used as a traffic lane. Minimize use of plastic bollards.

### ***Rockhill Road to Trolley Trail***

1. Follow the same pattern between Rockhill Road and Oak Street with bike lanes on the North and parking on the south of Cleaver, including along Theis Park.
2. Do not use Rockhill Road to take the bike lanes south to Volker and then on to the Trolley Trail. Recommend Oak Street South to 51st or 55th and then West to Trolley Trail. Oak is already a designated bike path, functionally a single lane in each direction and less residential.

## **GARDENING IN ROCKHILL**

*By the Rockhill Homes and Gardens Club*

It is easy for gardeners to get carried away in Spring when visiting the many excellent nurseries in the Kansas City area, including Soil Service, Suburban (both locations), and Family Tree (both locations). After a long winter, these nursery oases of beautiful, healthy and blooming shrubs, perennials and annuals, as well as the host of glossy gardening catalogs, offer a welcome respite from winter, along with the enticing temptation to purchase. Their promise can be destroyed (along with our budgets) by choosing shrubs that do not do well in our area.

The USDA defines plant hardiness zones based on an average of winter temperatures. In 2023, parts of Kansas City, including our neighborhood, were designated 6b, warmer than most of our region, which is 6a. Just 11 years ago, however, we were zone 6a, and the current 6a was 5b. The changes are the result of an average 5 degree increase in winter temperatures in our zip code (yes, climate change is real).

A wonderful book by Diane Heilenman ("Gardening in the Lower Midwest"), published in 1994, calls the lower Midwest the Zombie Zones because of our wide temperature fluctuations and the unpredictability of temperatures that can change dramatically from hot to cold or vice versa. It goes without saying that these rapid changes in temperature

are stressful to the survival of trees and shrubs, in fact, just as much so as the coldest or hottest temperatures of the year. Last year a sudden freeze when the weather had been unusually warm led to the death of many older Japanese maples in our area.

Diane Heilenman writes: "Only local gardeners really know what grows well in their region. That's why the UDA sensibly looks for volunteers to tell them which among a list of 2000 plants grew well where." In that vein, a few tips on shrubs that survive and thrive in Rockhill are offered by someone who has been gardening in Rockhill for over 25 years, and who has been responsible for the demise of many inappropriate plant choices, as well as a witness to the near miraculous survival of others.

Boxwoods and viburnas (there are many varieties of each) are high on the list of desirable shrubs, as both require little attention. Boxwoods do have an advantage over most viburnas by remaining green throughout the year. (One appreciates the importance for garden structure of any plant that remains green during the winter). Some viburnas do keep their leaves, however, for most of the winter. Boxwoods need to be pruned regularly once they reach their desired size, whereas viburnas require little pruning, offer a larger variety of shapes, and have attractive spring blooms. Some, like Korean Spice, also have a beautiful scent.

Oak leaf hydrangeas are also high on the list of easy-care shrubs that have 4 season interest. Snow Queen has upright white panicles, but no scent; the white panicles on Alice grow more sideways, but scent the entire garden in spring. The panicles on both gradually change to pink and eventually to brown in fall as the leaves turn red.

New varieties of these three plant families continue to be created. Before you purchase, be sure to use our friend Google to learn about the conditions that favor growth and blooming of each variety and provide information about scent and expected ultimate size.

## **WELCOME THE SEBREE FAMILY**

*by Ed Straley*

Please welcome the Sebree family to Rockhill. Frank and Jolyn live in the yellow "colonial revival" house at 600 East 45<sup>th</sup> Street with their four daughters Jenssen, Sadie, Sydney and Ella. Frank was raised in Kansas City. He received his undergraduate degree from Middlebury College before attending George Washington Law School. Jolyn hails from South Dakota and attended the University of South Dakota, followed by the University of Nebraska Law School. Frank and Jolyn met while summer interns at the Kansas City law firm of Shook, Hardy and Bacon. Shortly after they were married the Sebrees moved to the south of France for nine months while Frank earned his Masters of Legal Letters degree in European Business Law. Jolyn is General Counsel at Hostess Brands. Frank owns The Majestic Restaurant on Broadway in downtown Kansas City.

Jenssen is in her second year at Northwestern University in Illinois. Sadie is a senior, Sydney a sophomore, and Ella a fifth grader, all at Pembroke Hill.

The Sebrees enjoy sports and are proud Chiefs' season ticket holders. They also love to travel, and over the last several years visited France, Italy, Brazil, Japan, Croatia, as well as Hawaii and many other states in the USA.

Although we are just now formally welcoming the Sebrees, they have lived in Rockhill for several years already. Frank was recently elected to serve on the Rockhill Board. They describe Rockhill as "a very friendly and livable area with a lot of character, and a great place to raise children." Well stated. We couldn't agree more. Welcome to Rockhill. We are happy to have you as neighbors.

## **GENRE OF GARDEN WRITING**

*By Susan Carlson*

"English duchesses can cover themselves with dirt and lose their diamond rings among the peonies. In central and eastern Europe such conduct was excused only if one was a

foreigner, and then only barely.” This line in the forward to Eleanor Perenyi’s wonderful book “Green Thoughts: A Writer in the Garden” hooked me on the genre of garden writing. I’m not the only one! In his introduction to a series of classic garden writing books published by Modern Library Gardening, Michael Pollan attributes her book and his “rodenticidal rage” for the woodchuck in his garden to his own vocation as a writer.

Garden writing differs from “how to” books on gardening, though the books include plenty of good advice and strong opinions and prejudices, frequently counter to the equally strong opinions of other garden writers. The garden writers who have contributed to this genre mostly come from an earlier generation than mine. Their voices are a romantic connection to writers who had a passion for gardening, and who gardened (my imagination) when time moved slower than today and permitted more labor-intensive pastimes (most also had paid help to maintain their creations).

The following is a list of worthwhile books in this genre: Margery Fish, “We Made a Garden;” Frank Kingdon Ward, “In the Land of Blue Poppies;” Karel Capek, “The Gardener’s Year;” Charles Dudley Warner, “My Summer in a Garden;” Henry Mitchell, “One Man’s Garden;” Vita Sackville-West, “In Your Garden and in Your Garden Again;” Diane Ackerman, “Cultivating Delight: A Natural History of My Garden;” and Katharine S. White, “Onward and Upward in the Garden.” Living authors who have contributed to the genre of garden writing include Dominique Browning’s “Paths of Desire: The Passions of a Suburban Gardener,” and Michael Pollan’s book “The Botany of Desire.”

Winter is a great time for gardeners and would be gardeners to curl up with one of these books in front of a nice fire while the cold wind blows outside!

*[If you have the urge to write a short essay on one of your interests for the next newsletter, please send to Galen Mussman before April (Mussmang@gmail.com)].*

## **CURRENT RHA BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Nancy Abraham: [abraham.family@att.net](mailto:abraham.family@att.net)

Russell Baker: [rbaker@spencerfane.com](mailto:rbaker@spencerfane.com)

*Vice President*

Gerry Carlson: [gcarlson@kumc.edu](mailto:gcarlson@kumc.edu)

*President*

Jamie Closson:

[jamiec@kansascityhomes.com](mailto:jamiec@kansascityhomes.com)

Lance Harshbarger: [lhars77@gmail.com](mailto:lhars77@gmail.com)

Lisa Hickok: [lisaschuberthickok@gmail.com](mailto:lisaschuberthickok@gmail.com)

*Co-webmaster*

Patricia Miller: [patricia.miller@rockhurst.edu](mailto:patricia.miller@rockhurst.edu)

*Secretary*

Sarah Murphy: [mrphism@gmail.com](mailto:mrphism@gmail.com)

Galen Mussman: [mussmang@gmail.com](mailto:mussmang@gmail.com)

*RHT Editor*

Barry Nickel: [barrynickell@hotmail.com](mailto:barrynickell@hotmail.com)

*Treasurer*

Frank Sebree: [fpsebree@yahoo.com](mailto:fpsebree@yahoo.com)>

Ed Straley: [hestraley@gmail.com](mailto:hestraley@gmail.com)

Erika Vento-Gaudens:

[erika\\_vento@yahoo.com](mailto:erika_vento@yahoo.com)

Jim Wanser: [wanserj@umkc.edu](mailto:wanserj@umkc.edu)

Margi Wilson: [wilsonmargi@hotmail.com](mailto:wilsonmargi@hotmail.com)

## **Non-voting Board Affiliates**

Joy Payne: [joypayne1@me.com](mailto:joypayne1@me.com)

*Chair of Block Chairs*

Jim Sager: [saygrrrr@sbcglobal.net](mailto:saygrrrr@sbcglobal.net)

*Security Co-Chair*

Ellis Thigpen: [ethigpen33@gmail.com](mailto:ethigpen33@gmail.com)

*Security Co-Chair*

Tom Winter: [winter.i.thomas@gmail.com](mailto:winter.i.thomas@gmail.com)

*Co-Webmaster*

## **ONE STOP SHOP FOR RHA NEWS**

Neighbor Tom Winter manages our website (<https://rockhillkc.org>) where you can find current events, links to neighborhood news, and shortcuts for City services. Tom encourages you to provide information about your home that he can put it on the website. Our goal is to include everyone’s home!

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*The Spring edition of the Rockhill Times will be distributed in early April. If you have information to share, or notices of recognition or events, please send them to [mussmang@gmail.com](mailto:mussmang@gmail.com). Previous issues of the Times can be found at [www.rockhillkc.org/archives.html](http://www.rockhillkc.org/archives.html)*