

bcsem

December 2014

**POINTS OF INTEREST:**

Our December Quarterly Meeting is being hosted by Harrison Township on December 4th at DeCarlo's in Warren.

**YOUR HELP IS NEEDED! BE THE HOST COMMUNITY FOR OUR MARCH 2015 QUARTERLY! WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU! CONTACT JAMES KEEHN AT 586-894-8562 TO VOLUNTEER TODAY!**



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# Beautification Council of Southeastern Michigan

## *Community Beautification & Property Values by Nancy Thompson*

Just one community beautification project such as a massive tulip planting or new park benches, generates positive publicity for you. A pleasant community appearance adds to home values, helps attract business investment, and just improves the neighborhood reputation. Research shows that beauty is one of the top three factors in creating community attachment, or loyalty, to your particular town or city.

To look good, it's really helpful to understand some urban design principles. When people take what is called visual preference surveys, usually the results are lop-sided. In this technique, participants are simply asked which type of street scene or building they prefer.

First, assess community design factors. If your neighborhood is completely built up, you often can't alter the most critical parts of community design, but it's good to be aware of them, and do what you can to encourage a pleasing design through zoning and other means. People really prefer some compatibility of architectural styles. They like the fronts of houses on a block to line up within a certain degree of tolerance. People prefer a vibrant scene with some personality, as long as you don't overdue variation. Everything doesn't have to be perfect to have a pleasing neighborhood character, just have a critical mass of pleasant elements. Make your neighborhood just a little bit distinctive. The right balance between monotony and repetition in a community is important.

Small town character distinguishes one town from another. You have probably heard it said that one town is well-kept while another looks "junky". If your communities original design is mismatched and too varied, that's where the beautification campaign to distract the eye becomes critical. To improve community appearance, neighborhoods often try to

update what is known as "streetscape". This pertains to the area between the driving lanes and the edge of the private property. This is a popular strategy because it is a public space, and it's easier for the local government to dictate what will happen there. In truth, streetscape can be effective in uniting block faces or a series of blocks that are discordant in some way. Because streetscape often includes plantings, the effect is used to soften the view created by streets and hopefully sidewalks. Care in the choice of plant materials and the quality of installation makes the difference in this form of beautification.

In addition to streetscape, sometimes you need a focal point. This might be public art, a fountain, a clock tower, or a striking garden or grouping of ornamental grasses. If you already have a lonely statue with nothing around it, consider adding a couple of large planting beds, and a bench or two. Don't overlook the opportunity to organize private citizens into their own little beautification campaign group. People might try to out-do one another in installing great looking community landscaping. A public space garden-planting, or tree-planting event is great for improving community appearance over the course of a few years at a low cost.

Eyesores in your community are a little bit like the squeaky door at your house. If you let them go long enough, you no longer "see" them. Newcomers to your community do not overlook the obvious. If your park is full of debris and litter, hold a park clean-up event. Make sure to include litter pick-up in ditches, and along the banks of rivers or bodies of water. These kinds of regularly-scheduled events bring awareness to residents and create buy-in to keep your community clean. Vacant buildings and vacant land can be an unattractive community feature. Meet with community officials to determine how you can make buildings look occupied. (Continued on page 4)

### *Message from the President by James Keehn*

At the beginning of the year I was invited to present an award for fifty years of participation to both the Roseville and Mr. Clemens Beautification Commissions. I was honored to do so, as both of the presentations were in conjunction with their city Board meetings. This allows the public to see that not only does their city's beautification commission have a civic presence, but also is active in the region. Driving around these communities you can see the work that these Commissions have completed. I enjoyed spending time with the executives from both cities in preparation for the events.

During the year I spent some time visiting various Beautification Commission meetings and events, most notably Auburn Hills, St. Clair Shores, and Wyandotte. My message to these Commissions was the availability and platform of BCSEM as a place to share ideas, and to turn to for advice on their own community projects.

I am proud of the Board of Directors we have at BCSEM, and acknowledge the wisdom and guidance they have shown to me over this my first year. A big thank you to all.

I enjoyed attending BCSEM member community events such as the plant exchange in Auburn Hills during the Spring. The attendance was amazing to see. In addition to the plant exchange, there were raffles held, and activities for the children. The pavilion at their park provided some shelter, as it was a chilly Spring day. A river clean-up was also occurring during the plant exchange emphasizing the public's participation in the city.

Some of my time during visits to communities is spent talking about hosting our quarterly meetings. Sitting at the Commission planning meetings, I enjoy learning how each community works together to bring forth ideas for hosting our BCSEM meetings.

Each have their particular signature from the selection of their catering service, to speakers chosen to share education, and the local raffle prizes from their surrounding area.

I am a member of the Harrison Township Beautification Commission, so I am quite familiar with their events. I truly enjoyed being involved in their Inspirations Garden Tour, garden recognition month, garden planning and installation, our plant exchange, and the Veteran's Memorial program this year. It was the first year for our garden tour, and highlighted the talented gardeners we have in the township. It was the second year for our plant exchange. It was held in the parking lot of one of our township parks. Participants packed their vehicle trunks with bare-root plants and pulled into a parking spot. They opened their trunks or lowered their tailgates and enjoyed sharing and exchanging plants. Each event was well-attended, and brought uniqueness of our community and anticipation to our guests. Through these events, we have increased awareness of who we are and what we can do for the township. We have also increased our Beautification Commission volunteer membership and talent by having these events.

Sharing Beautification ideas, events, education, and talent is what we are all about. Please utilize our pool of talent at each quarterly meeting by talking to other Commission members. Find out what community events they are doing and how they're doing it, so you can do it too.

I'm so grateful for all you have shared with me and other members this year, and I look forward to another year of meeting with BCSEM member commissions and helping them accomplish their goals, while gleaning information from their accomplishments.

*Sincerely, Jim Keehn*

**PEACE AND JOY  
TO YOU AND YOURS THIS  
HOLIDAY SEASON.**



## *How to Make Homemade Wreaths*

### Things You'll Need:

Evergreen branches, garden clippers, wire wreath frame, spool of florists wire, wire cutters, decorative trimmings (pine cones, berries, fake fruit, seed pods, large leaves, etc.), hot glue gun, bows or ribbons.

1. Cut greenery to 6-8 inch lengths, Use a variety of evergreen species if possible like pine, fir, balsam, and holly.
2. Wrap wire around the stem of one piece of greenery. Lay the stem with the wire attached against the inner circle of the wreath frame. Wrap the wire around both the stem and the frame a couple of times. Do not cut the wire.
3. Lay the second stem of the greenery atop the first, about one inch farther along the circle. Both pieces of greenery should have their tips pointed in the same direction. Wrap the wire around the stem and the frame. Continue in this manner until the inner circle of the wreath frame is covered in greenery.
4. Wire greenery to the next circle of wire on the wreath frame. Lay all the greenery in the same direction, one on top of the other, until the circles of the wreath are filled. Cut the wire and tuck the ends in.
5. Add berries, Christmas ornaments, fake fruit, vegetables, cinnamon sticks, star anise, pinecones, seed pods, etc. with more wire or with a hot glue gun. Finish with ribbons or a bow.
6. Cut a piece of ribbon 18 inches long. Loop it around the top of the wreath and tie a knot to form a loop for hanging the wreath.



Wreaths made of fresh greenery fill the house with the aroma of pine and add a lushness to your holiday décor. Making homemade wreaths for use indoors or outside is an economical way to decorate, and a fun project. Gather greens from your yard or nearby woods, or ask a Christmas tree lot for branches trimmed from the trees they sell. Save the wreath forms and use them to make new wreaths for each season.

## *Unique Beautification Projects for Winter Months*



### **Winter Container Demonstration :**

Line-up a talk at your community center or library on how to assemble a fabulous outdoor winter planter, using the talent of your local plant nursery personnel.

**Plan an informational speakers night, featuring "How To" directions on a variety of garden projects.** Use your own volunteers talent, or solicit local professionals. Feature community projects and recruit volunteers.

**Winter walk in your community park:** Ask a naturalist to point out plants, trees, and wildlife. Have stations for hot chocolate, and plant and wildlife information flyers. Ask local feed stores to provide bird seed to feed birds along the way, or give away to attendees.

**Family DIY garden project:** Attract families by providing an all ages DIY project on a weekend. Ask them to bring materials or provide them with materials for a fee or get them donated. Make a birdhouse, stepping stones, or garden art.



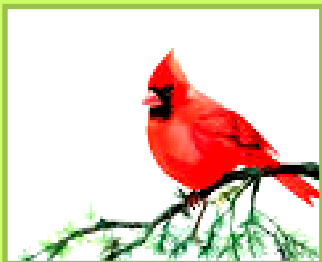


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**CURRENT BOARD MEMBERS:**

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*Community Beautification & Property Values*

*(continued from page 1)*

Vacant lots and buildings make us wonder about the block, even if the lots are otherwise neat and tidy. A beautification project might include litter collection, planting, or adding uniform fencing. You can help a building look occupied by adding blinds to the windows, putting things inside on the windowsills, and adding furniture by the windows that is visible. Of course you need permission to do so, but a little “staging” goes a long way in masking inactivity. It can go a long way to help in the positive perception of a community.

Alleys can be a trash magnet. Assigning them a use can go a long way toward creating a positive stigma for them. Consider alleys for additional parking with plantings and directional signs.

Signs can be a source of visual clutter. Every business thinks they are entitled to a sign. They can compete for resident and visitors attention creating a dizzying array of sizes shapes and colors. Enforcing sign regulations in a community can go a long way toward a more pleasant public space.

Outdoor seating requires sturdy, serviceable benches. Place benches in areas of heavy use such as bike paths, or in areas of contemplation such as parks. Consider cement slabs to mount benches on or pavers to give the benches grounding and a more formal look. Place trash receptacles, and cigarette receptacles near benches, and make sure they are emptied on a regular basis.

Consider bike racks located in strategic

areas such as parks, near concessions or downtown areas. Residents and visitors of communities want to reflect an acceptance of bicycles for their community entry and exploration. More and more communities accommodate bicycling for families in the form of bike paths, and bike lanes. Adding bike racks in specific use areas is the icing on the cake.

Outdoor drinking fountains or water bottle filling stations can support outdoor activity in community parks, and at key spots in your downtown area. You might also consider a low bowl fountain for dogs, incorporate a dog park, or stations with bags for dog doo-doo. Public restrooms should be available for visitors, nicely landscaped, and cleaned on a regular basis. Adequate and consistent street signs and lighting go a long way in making residents and visitors feel at ease., day or night.

So what’s in your beautification imagination? Have you taken a good look at what’s going on in your community lately? Take the time to take a tour with a critical eye. Make a list of all that is well and all that isn’t in your community. Make some suggestions and outline some plans where your beautification group can make some impact on your surroundings. Meet with your local officials to get support for your plans and consider what you can do for 2015 towards improving your community and neighborhoods for yourselves, for visitors, and for the future. Winter is the perfect time to let the creative juices flow and firm up plans for next year.