
Sec. 5.8.03. Grand River Overlay District (OD-GR).

- A. *Purpose.* As Grand Rapids' most significant natural asset, the Grand River plays an important role in enhancing the quality of life of its residents. The Grand River Overlay District is intended to capitalize on the value of the Grand River as an essential economic, recreational and environmental resource by encouraging land use changes from industrial to open space and mixed-use development. The Grand River Overlay District seeks to introduce new development practices and land use patterns that enhances the extent to which people can view, access and enjoy the riverfront by providing opportunities for viewsheds, easements and recreational opportunities. It is intended that:
1. Visibility of the Grand River is increased and enhanced by requiring building setbacks that will provide for improved views of the River.
 2. Existing river walk segments be extended along the entire length of the Grand River to allow for a continuous connection alongside the River for recreational and environmental quality purposes through donation, acquisition and easements.
 3. Wildlife corridors along the River's edges be supported through a continuous network of greenspaces.
 4. Water quality be improved with the introduction of less-intense, mixed land uses that are setback from the River's edge as opposed to present, directly abutting industrial uses and paved surfaces.
 5. Building heights generally conform to nearby buildings along the river corridor to provide a sense of visual continuity. Building heights should be configured to provide views to the Grand River and other significant landmarks while allowing an appropriate development intensity.
 6. A variety of people-oriented destinations be created along the river walk to provide visual interest, activity and vibrancy. Mixed-use development and high-density residential construction are essential components for encouraging pedestrian activity and public safety.
- B. *Applicability.* The requirements of this Overlay District shall apply to any lot or parcel shown on the Grand River Overlay Maps B1-B3, from the ordinary high water mark, floodwall or dock line, whichever is applicable as determined by the Planning Director, on each side of and paralleling the Grand River.
- C. *Uses.* Any lot or parcel within the OD-GR District shall be subject to the use regulations of the base Zone District. All uses in the TN Transitional City Center (TN-TCC) Zone District are allowed in the OD-GR District.
- D. *Site Layout and Building Placement Requirements.*
1. Where a property directly abuts the Grand River, buildings shall be sited to encourage pedestrian activity on both the street side and river side of the property.
 2. All development in the OD-GR District shall comply with the requirements in Table 5.8.03.D. unless otherwise expressly stated. Where specified, these requirements supersede the site layout and building placement requirements of the base Zone District.

Table 5.8.03.D. Site Layout and Building Placement: Grand River Overlay District		
Lot Area and Width		As required in the base Zone District
Front Setback	Street side	As required in the base Zone District.
	River side	All buildings shall maintain a minimum setback of 30% of the lot depth, but in no case shall the required setback exceed 50 ft. or be less than 30 ft. from the river walk, floodwall, shore or dock line of the Grand River, whichever is applicable. A setback may be reduced through an Optional Plan Review by the Planning Commission.

Side Yard Setback	20 ft. minimum setback on one side; other side yard may be developed at the property line or at a minimum distance of 5 ft.
	A side yard setback may be reduced to 5 ft. on a side lot line that borders a permanent public open space. The remaining side yard may be developed at the property line or at a minimum distance of 5 ft.
Permitted Yard Encroachment	Uncovered, outdoor seating areas may extend into a front yard, provided that a minimum of 14 ft. is maintained between the river walk, floodwall, shore or dock line of the Grand River, whichever is applicable.
Greenspace	30% of lot area.

- E. *Building Elements.* All development in the OD-GR District shall comply with the requirements in Table 5.8.03.E. Where specified in this Section, these requirements supersede the building element requirements of the Zone District. Where not specified, the requirements of the underlying Zone District requirements shall prevail.

Table 5.8.03.E. Building Height and Step-backs: Grand River Overlay District						
Subarea	Permitted height (stories)		Max. height with bonuses	Step-backs		Notes
	Min.	Max.		Option A (40% linear frontage along all bldg. faces)	Option B (30% linear frontage along all bldg. faces)	
DH-1	3	None	None	None		
DH-2(a)	3	10	20	2 nd -11 th floor - 15 ft 17-19 th floor - 15 ft	2 nd -11 th floor - 20 ft 17 th -19 th floor - 20 ft	See 5.8.03.E.1.e
TCC	3	5	7	2 nd -4 th floor - 15 ft	2 nd -4 th floor - 20 ft	See 5.8.03.E.1.e

1. *Step-backs.*

- a. *Purpose and intent.* A step-back is a portion of a building or structure that is recessed from the base of the structure at a defined story. The requirements for building step-backs are intended to ensure compatibility of the proposed development with the location, height, scale, and spacing of existing or approved buildings, and in particular other buildings on the same or adjacent blocks. To encourage public access to the river, some of the step-back requirements may be waived if said access is provided.
- b. *Applicability.*
 - i. A step-back is required per the regulations of Table 5.8.03.E.
 - ii. In the Grand River Overlay District, step-backs are required on all building faces (river, street, and two sides).
- c. *DH-2(a) requirements.*
 - i. For buildings 11 stories or taller, one (1) step-back is required somewhere between the 2nd and 11th floors.

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- ii. For buildings 17 stories or taller, one (1) additional step-back is required somewhere between the 17th and 19th floors.
 - iii. The step-back can either be 15 feet for 40 percent of the linear building frontage (Option A), or 20 feet for 30 percent of the linear building frontage (Option B).
 - iv. Administrative Departure. For buildings 17 stories or taller, an Administrative Departure may be approved to allow one (1) step-back of 30 feet for 40 percent of the linear building frontage or one (1) step-back of 40 feet for 30 percent of the linear building frontage.
- d. *TN-TCC requirements.*
- i. For buildings six (6) stories or taller, one (1) step-back is required somewhere between the 2nd and 4th floors.
 - ii. The step-back can either be 15 feet for 40 percent of the linear building frontage (Option A), or 20 feet for 30 percent of the linear building frontage (Option B).
- e. *Public access easement.*
- i. If a public access easement of a minimum of 15 feet is provided from the public right-of-way to the river, the step-back requirement of Table 5.8.03.E. shall only apply to the river and street faces of the building.
 - ii. Administrative Departure. Where public access to the river already exists within 100 feet, the side façade step-back requirement can be waived without providing public access as described in Section 5.8.03.E.1.

2. *Materials.* As required in the base Zone District, except that at least 60% of the building wall facing the river, exclusive of wall areas devoted to meeting transparency requirements, shall be constructed of brick, glass, fiber cement siding, wood lap, stucco, split-faced block, or stone.

3. *Façade Variation.* As required in the base Zone District, except that the requirements for building walls facing a street shall also apply to the building wall facing the river.

4. *Entrance.*

- a. All office buildings, retail sales and service establishments shall have a visible and usable building entrance for customers on both the building wall facing the street and the building wall facing the river.
- b. Primary building entrances, including those entrances facing the river, shall be clearly identified using an awning, paving treatments, change in roofline or other features, such as canopies, porticos, arcades, arches, wing walls, and integral planters.
- c. Primary building entrances and exits shall be located on the primary street. Doorways that open to the sidewalk or multi-use trail shall be recessed.

5. *Expression Line.*

- a. An expression line shall be provided to distinguish the base from the remainder of the building to provide a design element that enhances the pedestrian environment. If applicable, the height of the expression line shall meet the prevailing scale of development in the area.
- b. The expression line may be created by a change in material, a change in design, or by a continuous setback, recess, or projection above or below the expression line. Elements such as cornices, belt courses, corbelling, molding, stringcourses, ornamentation, awnings or canopies, and changes in material or color or other sculpturing of the base, are appropriate design elements to include with an expression line.

6. Transparency. As required in the base Zone District, except that the requirements for building walls facing a street shall also apply to the building wall facing the river

7. Streetscape Plan. Standards used by the City Engineer to determine appropriate street tree plantings, walking surfaces and parkway landscaping shall be used where a City-recognized streetscape plan for a defined area has not been adopted (see Section 5.11.13.C.).

8. Parking. Parking areas and parking structures shall be separated from the river by intervening buildings, except:

a. Where retail space is provided on the ground floor of the parking structure, and at least fifty (50) percent of its façade facing the river is used as display windows; or

b. Where a mural or other public art approved by the Planning Commission is provided on the parking structure on the river side of the structure, or in a landscaped area along the river.

c. Where a. or b. above apply, the parking area or structure shall have a minimum required front setback of thirty (30) feet from the Grand River.

9. Landscaping and Access.

a. Land between the building and the river shall be landscaped and designed as an urban open space for pedestrian use meeting the requirements of Section 5.11.14. Parking areas shall meet the minimum screening requirements of Section 5.11.11.C.

b. Pedestrian walkways that connect to the river's edge shall be provided between buildings, parking areas or structures, and other built features such as outdoor plazas and courtyards.

c. Service areas and mechanical equipment shall be visually unobtrusive and shall be integrated with the design of the site and building.

i. Utility boxes shall be positioned so they cannot be seen from the river or Primary Street by locating them on the sides of buildings and away from pedestrian and vehicular routes.

ii. Air intake and exhaust systems, or other mechanical equipment that generates noise, smoke or odors shall not be located on the river side of buildings.

F. Grand River Overlay District Bonus Height Criteria. Development projects in the DH-2(a) Overlay District and TN-TCC Zone District that fall within the Grand River Overlay District may qualify for height bonuses in accordance with Table 5.8.03.F. using the criteria described below.

Table 5.8.03.F. Bonus Heights: Properties within Grand River Overlay District			
Underlying Zone District	Incentive/Bonus		Bonus Stories
DH-2(a)	Public access easement with trail	Parallel to river (30 ft wide)	9
	Public art		1
TCC	Public access easement with trail	Parallel to the river (30 ft wide)	2
	Public art		1

1. Public Access Easement.

a. To qualify for the bonus height, a public access easement at least thirty (30) feet wide, extending across the entirety of the lot on the river side of the main building shall be provided.

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- b. Access shall be through permanent easements and shall conform to the provisions of urban open space of Section 5.11.14.B.3. Configuration and Section 5.11.14.B.4. Availability.
 - c. A multi-use trail shall also be provided that conforms to the requirements of the City Parks and Recreation Department.

2. *Public Art.*

- a. A development that elects this bonus may use any of the following methods:
 - i. Allocate one (1) percent of the estimated construction cost for a permanent, on-site public art project(s). The artwork created must be where the public can access the artwork during normal business hours or continually view the artwork from off the site; or
 - ii. Contribute one (1) percent of the project's estimated construction cost to the Arts Advisory Committee.
- b. Regardless of the above method selected, the minimum required expenditure shall be ten thousand dollars (\$10,000.00).
- c. Public art installations on private property shall be maintained by the property owner.

(Ord. No. 2023-26, §§ 6—8, 7-11-23)