

Item Number: 1



# CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS AGENDA ACTION REQUEST

**DATE:** November 19, 2024

**TO:** Mark Washington, City Manager

**COMMITTEE:** City Commission Meeting  
**LIAISON:** N/A

**FROM:** Kristin Turkelson, Planning Director  
Planning, Design & Development

**SUBJECT:** **Public hearing to consider Bridge to Our Future, the Grand Rapids Community Master Plan**

On November 12, 2024, the City Commission established November 19, 2024 as the date to hold a public hearing on Bridge to Our Future, the Grand Rapids Community Master Plan.

## Overview

Bridge to Our Future, the Grand Rapids Community Master Plan, is a blueprint for how the community grows and evolves set forth by the Planning Commission and adopted by the City Commission. It builds community pride and defines a long-range vision for the future, typically 20 years.

The plan, once adopted, becomes a steering mechanism for the organization. It will be aligned with the City's five-year strategic plan and its recommendations will be prioritized through conversations with the City Commission. The priorities will be integrated into departmental operations and may include, but not be limited to:

- Annual work programs and budgets
- Development decisions
- Capital plan
- Operational policies
- Economic initiatives
- Private development decisions

## Engagement Process

The process to create a new Community Master Plan launched in 2020 with the hiring of twenty paid Neighborhood Facilitators as part of a pre-planning phase. The program meaningfully engaged the community to review the 2002 Master Plan to determine what

had worked, what did not work, and what needed to change with the next Plan. Facilitators hosted small reoccurring meetings that took the process into the community and special consideration was given to Neighborhoods of Focus and underrepresented communities.

The facilitators succeeded in completing robust engagement with over 90 meetings held and a total of 530 people participating. Importantly, the Black/African American participation was 33% vs a GR Census percentage of 19%. The input and emerging themes gathered from the facilitator program informed the request for proposals and the scope of work for hiring the consultant team.

The Bridge to Our Future planning process started in 2022, during which the Mayor, with input from City Commissioners from all three wards, appointed an approximately fifty-person Steering Committee that reflected the demographics of the City. The Steering Committee worked tirelessly to provide guidance for the four rounds of public engagement that began in early 2023 and ended in June 2024. Each round built on the last and featured community-wide meetings, usually one in each ward, as well as small meetings in communities hosted by hired Community Connectors and CDBG-funded Neighborhood Organizations. Community Connectors were trusted voices in the community who wanted to serve and didn't necessarily have to be affiliated with a formal organization. Additionally, each round featured online engagement opportunities.

Engagement in each round was tracked using exit questionnaires. Participants were asked to anonymously provide information including age, race, ethnicity, gender, education, and ward residency. The percentage of participants in each category was tracked against the overall percentage of the population of Grand Rapids, according to the US Census. This helped the planning team identify gaps in engagement and be more intentional about outreach efforts.

In total, the planning team collected over 4,700 exit questionnaires during the four engagement rounds and the pre-planning phase. The planning team received input from participants reflective of the city as a whole when it came to race, ethnicity, gender, and ward residency. A complete breakdown of engagement participation is included in the Plan Appendix.

## **Plan Content**

Based on the public engagement and data analysis, the process established five chapters expressing community goals, and five themes reflecting the community's values that are woven throughout the goal recommendations.

### *Goals (Chapters)*

1. Great Neighborhoods: Connected and diverse neighborhoods where residents can thrive. Grand Rapids neighborhoods will have access to housing, retail, open space, and more that meet the needs of residents in all phases of life.

2. Vital Business Districts: A network of unique and diverse businesses in all neighborhoods. Vital business districts will provide a variety of products, services, amenities, and safe, walkable places that attract people.
3. A Strong Economy: An economy that offers a prosperous quality of life. The Grand Rapids economy will offer a range of employers and job choices so that everyone can access and earn a living wage.
4. Balanced Mobility: A transportation network that is safe, reliable, and affordable. Grand Rapids will have mobility options that include a variety of ways to move about the city and beyond.
5. Development Character: A strong sense of place through high quality design. New development will improve or support the existing fabric of each neighborhood.

### *Themes*

1. Equity: Where all residents have access to resources that allow for opportunity, influence, and positive life outcomes no matter their starting point.
2. Safety: Where all people are secure and protected in all communities no matter where they live or come from, or what they look like.
3. Vibrancy: A variety of amenities, including arts, culture, and recreation opportunities, that activate and contribute to the energy of the city year-round.
4. Culture: Traditions and experiences that originate from one's background and lived experiences and can be shared and celebrated with others.
5. Sustainability: Balancing growth, environmental stewardship, and well-being in a way that fulfills current and ongoing needs and opportunities of future generations.

When implemented, the Plan aspires to build a sustainable city of inclusion, where people in all neighborhoods have the opportunity to live in safe and affordable housing, to move throughout the city in a variety of ways, to earn a living wage through meaningful job choices, and to gather together in vibrant spaces that celebrate our unique cultures and histories.

The plan also contains a Future Character and Land Use Map to guide future growth and development within the city and serve as the basis for the zoning ordinance update that will happen after plan adoption.

As part of the planning process, three new Area Specific Plans were created and cover the Creston, Butterworth, and Southtown Neighborhoods. Previously adopted Area Specific Plans will remain valid and will be incorporated with this new Community Master Plan.

The full text of the plan, including the recommendations and Area Specific Plans, are included in this agenda packet. Appendix A, the Community Engagement Summary, and Appendix B, Technical Analysis, are incorporated into the October 24, 2024 Planning Commission public hearing documents and may be viewed at <https://tinyurl.com/2024-10-24CMPpublichearing>.

### **Adoption Process and Public Comment**

On July 16, the Planning Commission and City Commission held a joint meeting to receive an introduction to the Plan. The Planning Commission then reviewed the draft document on August 8 and voted in support of forwarding the Plan to the City Commission for distribution to surrounding jurisdictions, utilities, and other interested parties for review and comment. The City Commission subsequently approved the release of the draft on August 13. This started a 63-day public comment period, which is required per the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. The Plan was available digitally on the City's webpage and in hard copy at Grand Rapids Public Library branches and by request. The public was invited to submit comments digitally via a comment form on the webpage or by e-mail. Hard copy comments were welcomed via mail and feedback forms at the library branches.

During the review period, the planning team presented two thorough reviews of the Plan to the Planning Commission on August 22 and September 26, along with a summary of the public comments received to date during the second presentation. City staff presented two high-level briefings about the Plan content to City Commission on September 10 and October 8. These meetings also provided individuals the opportunity to comment on the plan during the public comment portion of the meetings.

The 63-day period ended on October 16 and 107 comments were received. The planning team compiled the comments and provided responses indicating whether they were incorporated into the final plan, and, if not, the reason why. This spreadsheet was shared with Planning Commission in their October 24 agenda packet and is available on the project's webpage. Additionally, the planning team presented a summary of the comments to the Planning Commission at the October 24 public hearing for the Community Master Plan.

In addition to incorporating public comments in the final Plan, the consultant team incorporated comments from City staff and from the Planning Commission and City Commission. Many of the changes were minor and clarified language, but more significant changes included:

- Introduction:
  - Addition of a plan overview section to highlight bold changes by chapter and introduce the Future Character and Land Use Map.
- Chapter 2:
  - Additional guidance for future zoning updates regarding home businesses, micro businesses, and live-work units.

- Chapter 4:
  - Updated objective 4A to clarify the hierarchy of road users (pedestrian first).
- Chapter 5:
  - Updated design guidelines to clarify intent and remove redundant references.

On October 24, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on the Community Master Plan and Future Character and Land Use Map dated October 2024. Twelve community members spoke at the public hearing. Most spoke positively of the plan, expressing appreciation of the robust and intentional public engagement. In almost all cases, the speakers recognized that their feedback, comments, and recommendations were reflected in the plan.

The Planning Commission then thanked the public who had come to the meeting to speak. They reflected upon the comments and provided time for staff and the consultant to respond to the comments. They recognized and thanked the Steering Committee, commended the engagement, complimented the planning team on the work, and summarized the next steps in the process. The Planning Commission voted unanimously (7-0) to approve the plan and forward the Plan on to the City Commission for approval and adoption.

### **City Commission Action**

After the City Commission receives public comment on Bridge to Our Future, the proposed City of Grand Rapids Community Master Plan on November 19, 2024, it is anticipated that the City Commission will consider adoption of the Plan on December 3, 2024.

  
CORRECT IN FORM  
DEPARTMENT OF LAW