



[DRAFT] November 2024

# BRIDGE TO OUR FUTURE

**GRAND RAPIDS**  
COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN



hold for adoption resolution



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The City would like to thank the following individuals for their commitment and dedication in assisting with the Community Master Plan initiative. Sharing your knowledge, thoughts, and ideas rendered an invaluable service to your community. Additionally, the City would like to thank the many other community members who participated in Bridge to Our Future process.

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# THANK YOU

## FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

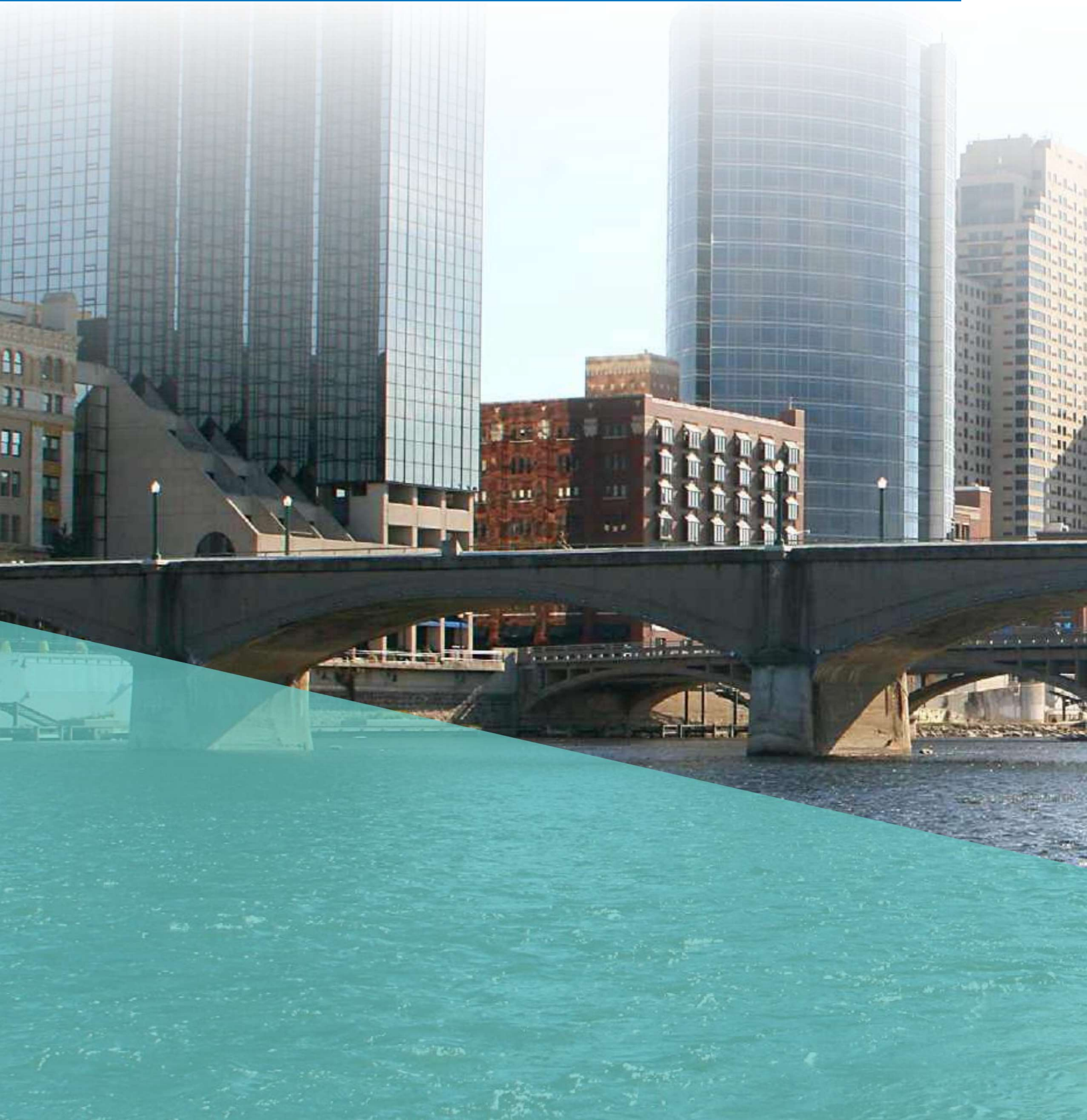
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# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background.....	2
Process .....	5
Plan Framework.....	12
 <b>Goals Areas and Recommendations .....</b>	 <b>16</b>
1. Great Neighborhoods.....	16
2. Vital Business Districts .....	36
3. A Strong Economy .....	48
4. Balanced Mobility.....	62
5. Desirable Development Character .....	74
6. Area Specific Plans .....	106
 <b>Implementation.....</b>	 <b>126</b>
 <b>Glossary of Terms .....</b>	 <b>142</b>
 <b>Appendix A: Community Engagement Summary</b>	
 <b>Appendix B: Technical Analysis</b>	

# INTRODUCTION

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In fall 2022, the City of Grand Rapids launched Bridge to Our Future, a process to create a new Community Master Plan. The previous Master Plan was adopted in 2002 and has been updated in the years since, but new challenges and opportunities called for a new plan. Bridge to Our Future was a community-driven process that focused on engaging residents of all backgrounds throughout the city. The result is a plan that includes a community-generated vision statement, value threads, goal areas, and specific recommendations to guide the future physical development of the city. The Community Master Plan sets a long-term direction for the city's growth and development and serves as a guide for decision-makers and the community for future development.

# BACKGROUND

---

## WHAT IS A COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN?

A Community Master Plan is the blueprint for how a community grows and develops, set forth by the Planning Commission and adopted by the City Commission. It is a statement of the community's character and defines a long-range vision for the desired future physical development of the community for the next 20 years. A Community Master Plan addresses a range of topics such as population, economy, housing, transportation, facilities, and land use. Cross cutting values such as equity, safety, and sustainability are woven throughout the plan goal areas. The plan integrates technical analysis with robust public input from residents, businesses, and other community stakeholders. The Community Master Plan serves as the foundation of the Zoning Ordinance, which is described in more detail in the Desirable Development Character chapter.

---

## WHY DOES GRAND RAPIDS NEED A NEW COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN?

To be effective, a plan must be periodically updated to account for changing conditions, new technologies, and other evolving factors. Much of the 2002 Master Plan has been implemented and there are new opportunities to build on that success. Since 2002, Grand Rapids has experienced many changes such as population growth, demographic and employment shifts, climate change effects, and a global pandemic. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008 emphasizes the importance of long-range planning by authorizing the creation of a Community Master Plan and requiring reviews of the plan every five years. The new City of Grand Rapids Community Master Plan promotes coordination around development and redevelopment, protects and enhances community development character, and establishes the legal basis for zoning. The Plan also addresses issues such as climate change and equity that were not included in the previous CMP.

## RELATION TO OTHER PLANS

This plan serves as the overall framework for growth within Grand Rapids. Some recent plans and studies that contain useful context are referenced within this plan where relevant. The recommendations in these plans remain relevant, regardless of explicit inclusion within the CMP. The table below indicates where significant planning efforts overlap with the chapter of the CMP.

### RECENT PLANS

- Directly advances the goal
- Supports or reinforces the goal

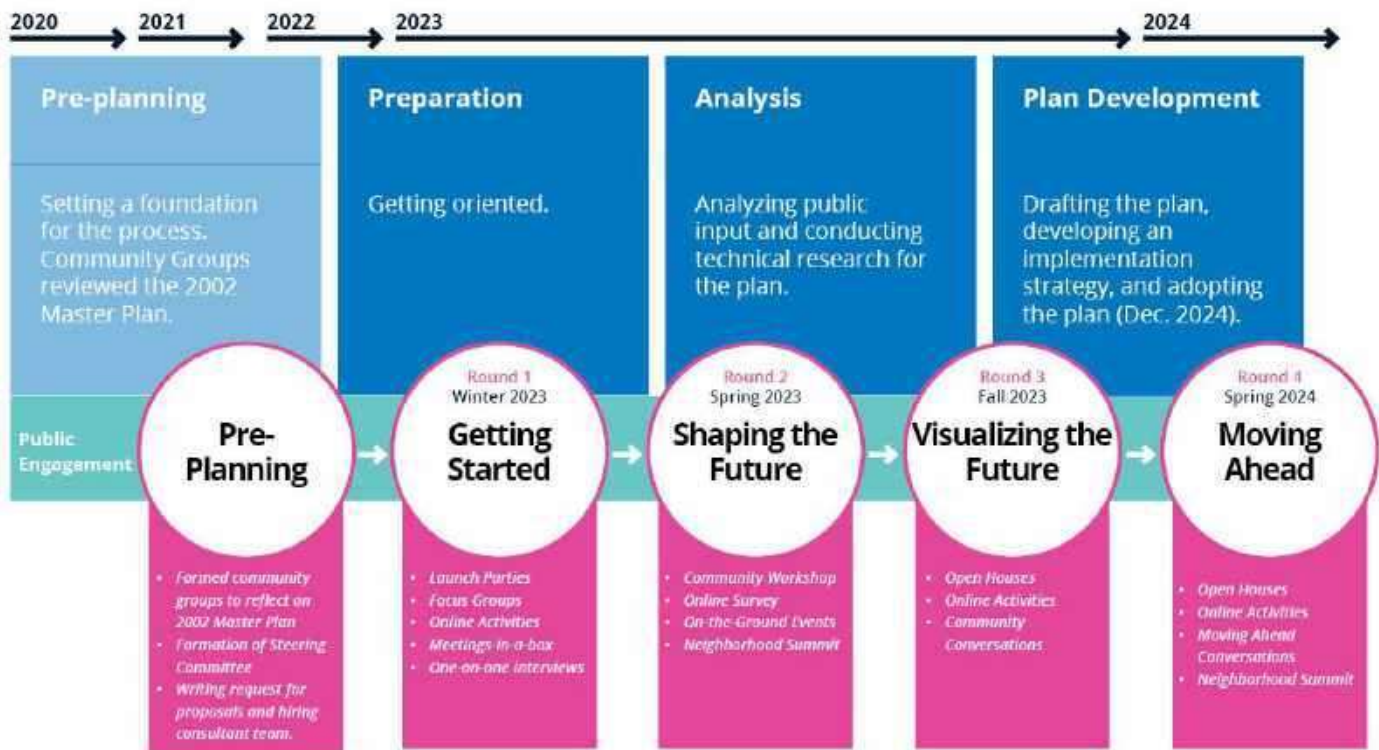
	GOALS	Great Neighborhoods Vital Business Districts Strong Economy Balanced Mobility Desirable Development Character				
Vital Streets Plan		<span style="color: gray;">●</span>	<span style="color: gray;">●</span>	<span style="color: gray;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: gray;">●</span>
GR Forward			<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>		
Equitable Economic Development & Mobility Strategic Plan			<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	
Climate Action and Adaptation Plan		<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: gray;">●</span>	<span style="color: gray;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: gray;">●</span>
Bicycle Action Plan					<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	
Area Specific Plans		<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>
Grand Valley Metropolitan Council Regional Transportation Demand Management Plan					<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	
The Rapid Transit Master Plan					<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	
The Right Place Strategic Plan			<span style="color: gray;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>		
Grand River Equity Framework		<span style="color: gray;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: gray;">●</span>
Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan		<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: gray;">●</span>	<span style="color: gray;">●</span>	<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	<span style="color: gray;">●</span>





# PROCESS

The plan was shaped by data, existing conditions, and the experiences of people who live, work, and play in Grand Rapids. The process to create the plan followed the timeline below.



## PRE-PLANNING PROCESS

Before commencing the Community Master Plan process, the City of Grand Rapids conducted a review of the 2002 Master Plan with the community in 2020. Facilitators from neighborhood organizations, non-profit organizations, and other community groups, as well as interested residents, held four rounds of sessions with community members to review the plan. The groups discussed the successes of the 2002 Master Plan and where improvements could be made with the next plan. The facilitators not only engaged over 500 community members in over 90 meetings, but also did an outstanding job responding to pandemic challenges by hosting meetings virtually, distanced, or outside. The insight gathered during the robust engagement effort contributed to the request for proposals and hiring of the consultant team, as well as the formation of the Steering Committee.

## STEERING COMMITTEE

Following the pre-planning phase, the City built a diverse Steering Committee with the Mayor appointing members of the committee with input from the City Commissioners. Additionally, individuals were selected to ensure representation reflective of the city as a whole across a number of factors such as ethnicity, gender, race, ward residency, and sector. Once appointed, members of the committee helped the City hire a consultant team to write the new Community Master Plan by reviewing the Request for Proposals. Four members of the Steering Committee and one member of the Planning Commission served on the interview panel, along with two City Planning staff members, to read and score proposals and interview and select the consultant team.

Once the CMP planning process began, the Steering Committee informed the planning process and the plan's content. The committee acted as advocates for the plan, supported outreach efforts, and helped to guide the engagement process. They met regularly to review materials, provide feedback, and advocate for the community. Members of the Steering Committee also acted as facilitators at engagement and some members tabled at community events or held their own events to solicit input.

The Steering Committee was led by a Leadership Committee comprised of five individuals, selected by the group, with four serving as permanent members while one person rotated. The Leadership Committee met with staff and consultants on a regular basis to assist in generating agendas for the Steering Committee meetings, discuss community engagement ideas, and address any special circumstances that arose.

## DEFINED

### PLANNING TEAM

The Planning Team included City staff and consultants with expertise in land use, transportation, economic development, sustainability, and community engagement.



Steering Committee Meetings



## PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process included four rounds of community input opportunities that focused on engaging a diverse community. These events were intended to facilitate open and transparent dialogue and easy participation. The engagement rounds moved from generative to responsive and each round of engagement built upon and affirmed the insight gathered from the previous round. A significant media relations effort expanded public awareness of these events and the CMP process. Cumulatively, the four phases of the community engagement campaign resulted in at least 24 news stories in print, radio, television, and online outlets with an estimated reach of more than 4 million individuals. Regular email updates to subscribers, posters at local libraries, articles in WeAreGR, and promotional materials distributed by the Steering Committee supplemented this effort.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

Community engagement was conducted concurrently with technical analysis on land use, economic conditions, and other topics. The planning team generated a community profile using data from the 2020 U.S. Decennial Census, the City of Grand Rapids, and other sources. The profile features baseline information about existing conditions in Grand Rapids and covers demographic conditions and trends, the built environment, housing, employment, and prosperity. This data informed the planning process and can be found throughout the plan chapters to support the recommendations. The full community profile is contained in Appendix B.

## COMMUNITY CONNECTORS

Populations that have historically been overlooked through traditional engagement approaches received special focus through a diverse team of Community Connectors.

The Community Connectors, trusted voices from diverse community backgrounds, were compensated for their efforts to expand engagement. Their partnership fostered direct communication between residents and the City, strengthening community relationships, and broadening participation through engagement activities in each of the four rounds within their neighborhoods. The group was comprised of community leaders and activists representing non-profit organizations, community groups, and other organizations from across Grand Rapids. They provided facilitation and outreach support throughout the engagement process through community conversations, one-on-one interviews, and more. Snacks and meals were offered during the outreach events to encourage participation.

## NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

The City of Grand Rapids has more than 30 neighborhood organizations, many of which were involved in the Community Master Plan (CMP) process in a variety of ways. Some Neighborhood Organizations were represented on the Steering Committee, while others served as Community Connectors. City-funded Neighborhood Organizations received additional Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to host engagement activities in their neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Organizations did everything the Community Connectors did and more. They spread the word to their residents and other stakeholders about the process to increase participation in the CMP process.

## FOCUS GROUPS

The planning team conducted a series of focus groups to supplement broader public engagement and generated more direct input on themes and topics important to the planning process. Focus groups discussed topics such as career development, economic development, transportation, social services, housing, and more. Residents, professionals, and other experts in the topics participated in the discussions and provided critical insights.

## GETTING STARTED

### ROUND 1: WINTER 2023

The City hosted three Launch Parties, one in each ward, and an online engagement campaign to generate excitement about the process. The events gathered ideas about the future of Grand Rapids, encouraging participants to dream big and share their visions to inform the direction of the plan. The Launch Parties were designed to be fun and engaging for participants of all ages and backgrounds. The activities were replicated online for people who were unable to participate in person. To gain more participation, Community Connectors and Neighborhood Organizations conducted additional small workshops in their communities that mirrored the activities from the larger workshops. They also completed one-on-one interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the community's needs. Representatives from the City facilitated activities from the workshops in local high school and college classes to generate input from students. Activities included:

- Grand Rapids trivia
- Hopes and dreams cards
- Small group discussions
- Comments on Area Specific Plan areas
- Future housing mapping

 **730+** participants  
**4,000+** pieces of input



## SHAPING THE FUTURE

### ROUND 2: SUMMER 2023

The second round of engagement took a deeper look at three important topics that emerged from the first round of community engagement. A workshop was held with an interactive approach to the topics of:

- Land Use Planning for Climate Mitigation and Adaptation
- Land Use Planning for Environmental Justice, Health, and Equity
- The 15-Minute City: Land Use, Housing, Mobility

Representatives from the planning team attended the City of Grand Rapids Neighborhood Summit. They held one session on the 15-Minute City and another that combined the other land use planning topics. Participants in the workshop and at the Neighborhood Summit were also asked to provide feedback on the draft vision, values, and goals of the Community Master Plan, which were created using input gathered in the first round of engagement and additionally vetted by the Steering Committee. Community Connectors and Neighborhood Organizations hosted Move and Talks, during which community members were invited to move through their neighborhood as a group and discuss and provide their feedback and ideas on topics such as housing, environmental justice, and health equity as they pertained to the neighborhood. City staff also engaged youth at local high schools and Parks and Recreation Department summer day camps to gather input from children and teens in the city. Staff also attended other city-wide events and festivals, including A Glimpse of Africa.



Public Meeting

 **1,800+** participants  
**2,500+** pieces of input



Creating Complete Neighborhoods



Creating Complete Neighborhoods



## VISUALIZING THE FUTURE


### ROUND 3: FALL 2023

The third round of engagement focused on testing the goals and big ideas that were developed using the insight provided by the community in the previous rounds of engagement. A workshop was held in all three wards where the goal and one big idea from each chapter, and an overview of each Area Specific Plan was presented. The participants completed a corresponding activity, covering topics such as Great Neighborhoods, Vital Business Districts, A Strong Economy, Balanced Mobility, and Desirable Development Character, where they were able to visualize outcomes of the plan and provide their feedback. For example, the Great Neighborhoods idea was centered around housing, and the activity asked for participants' thoughts on where accessory dwelling units, duplexes, and quadplexes should be allowed in the city. Each workshop opened with a special event. The first night featured a spoken word poetry performance from the Diatribe, the second night featured a panel put together by the Community Connectors and Neighborhood Organizations with individuals from community organizations, and the third night featured national-level public speaker and author Shane Phillips, who addressed strategies for housing affordability and access. The Community Connectors and Neighborhood Organizations picked a chapter or two from the plan to discuss further with their respective communities during small group meetings to broaden the reach and depth of the third round of engagement. Many opted to use the display boards from the community-wide events in addition to the meeting materials provided by the Planning Team. City staff generated input from students and youth in the city by holding conversations in high schools and attending two tabling events at Grand Rapids Community College.



Public Meetings



 **1,100+** participants  
**3,400+** pieces of input



## MOVING AHEAD

### ROUND 4: SPRING 2024

During the fourth round, one workshop was hosted in each of the three wards to share the draft recommendations for the plan. The workshops began with an open house showcasing the recommendations for each chapter of the plan. Participants reviewed the recommendations organized by chapter at their own pace using display boards and a corresponding worksheet with the planning team and consultants available to answer questions. During the second half of the workshops, participants dove deeper into a chapter of their choosing and had small group discussions to assign value threads to the recommendations. The Community Connectors, Neighborhood Organizations, and Steering Committee members hosted a roadshow of the display boards and facilitated Moving Ahead conversations around chapter recommendations.

## TOTAL PARTICIPATION

Total participation numbers reflect the pre-planning phase and all four rounds of engagement through the CMP process.

Engagement in each round was tracked using exit questionnaires. Participants were asked to provide basic information about their background, including age, race, ethnicity, education, and neighborhood. The representation of participants in each category was tracked against the overall percentage of the population of Grand Rapids, according to the US Census. While this helped the planning team identify gaps in engagement and be more intentional about outreach efforts, not all participants returned these forms, which can affect the overall data.

Across all rounds, the team engaged with people living in all three wards and every neighborhood. An additional 13% of participants reported living outside Grand Rapids. A complete breakdown of engagement participation is included in Appendix A of this plan.

**560+** participants  
**240+** pieces of input

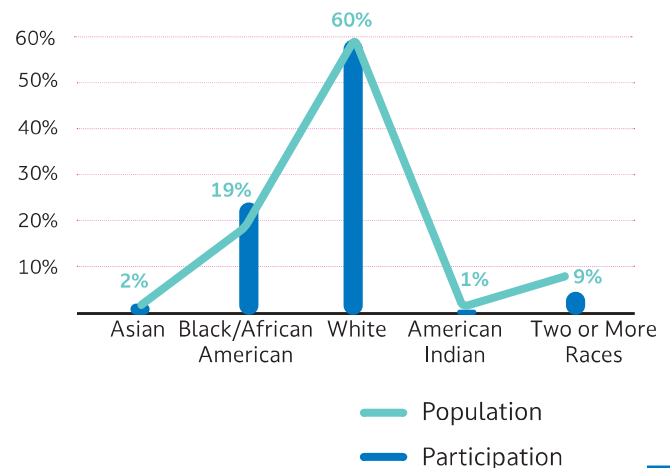


Public Meetings



**4,780+** participants  
**10,140+** pieces of input

Participation by Race (all rounds)



# PLAN FRAMEWORK

The Community Master Plan includes a vision for the future, values important to the community, and goals for the community to achieve. The plan framework provides an intentional path forward for the City of Grand Rapids and its partners.

## COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT

The vision is an expression of the community’s future and was tested in Round 2 of public engagement.

### In the next 20 years...

Grand Rapids 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.

## COMMUNITY VALUE THREADS

Values reflect, at a high level, what the community cares about. The value threads are woven throughout the plan chapters. Tagged recommendations indicate that recommended project, policy, or program directly advances that value.



**Equity:** Where all residents have access to resources that allow for opportunity, influence, and positive life outcomes no matter their starting point.



**Safety:** Where all people are secure and protected in all communities no matter where they live or come from, or what they look like.



**Vibrancy:** A variety of amenities, including arts, culture, and recreation opportunities, that activate and contribute to the energy of the city year-round.



**Culture:** Traditions and experiences that originate from one’s background and lived experiences and can be shared and celebrated with others.



**Sustainability:** Balancing growth, environmental stewardship, and well-being in a way that fulfills current and ongoing needs and opportunities of future generations.



## COMMUNITY GOAL AREAS

Goals are desired outcomes expressed in simple terms. Each goal area is a chapter of the plan.

- 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. Desirable Development Character:** A strong sense of place through high quality design. New development will improve or support the existing fabric of each neighborhood.

## OBJECTIVES

Objectives are strategic direction that organizes the recommendations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations include projects, policies, and programs to achieve desired outcomes.

# PLAN OVERVIEW

The plan chapters are organized into objectives and actions that focus on “how” growth and development should occur to meet the CMP goals. Each chapter provides policies, programs, and projects to advance the vision for Grand Rapids.

## COMMUNITY GOAL AREAS

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.
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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. **Desirable Development Character:** A strong sense of place through high quality design. New development will improve or support the existing fabric of each neighborhood.

**Bold changes** in this chapter include:

Allowing duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and accessory dwelling units in areas zoned for low-density residential.

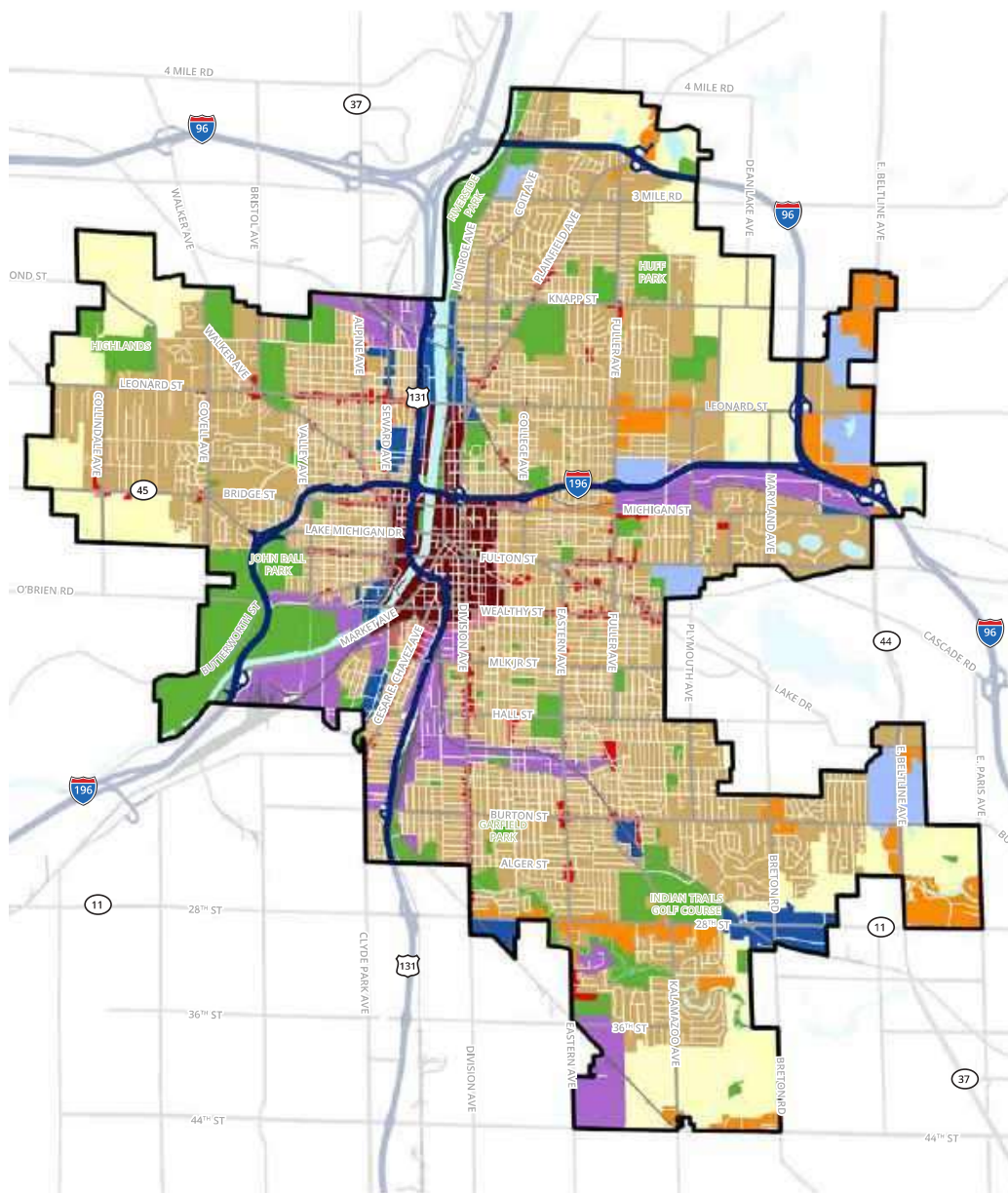
Raising maximum building heights in commercial districts to promote density.

Broadening allowable activities in Community Activity Centers to include light manufacturing and research.

Reducing or eliminating parking requirements to support infill development, especially near transit and in pedestrian-friendly areas.

Implementing a development character-based approach.

## FUTURE LAND USE AND CHARACTER MAP



- Downtown
- Transitional Activity Center
- Community Activity Center
- Neighborhood Center
- Compact Neighborhood

- Suburban Neighborhood
- Manufacturing & Logistics
- Campus
- Innovation Center
- Parks and Open Space

### A DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER-BASED APPROACH

This plan takes a character-based approach to shaping the future development of Grand Rapids. While the Future Character and Land Use Map includes land uses in each character type, it also describes the built form that is desired in each area.

There are a number of advantages to this approach, including:

- Sets clear expectations about the physical characteristics of development
- Indicates key infrastructure in a particular area
- Establishes a foundation for zoning code updates

# 1. GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS

---





Great neighborhoods are the foundation of the city. Historically, Grand Rapids was considered a highly affordable city for housing compared to other cities in Michigan and the United States. Grand Rapids has a long history of innovation in manufacturing that helped build a broad middle class, create vibrant neighborhoods, and provide residents with opportunities for homeownership and economic prosperity.

However, changing market conditions, along with other factors, have resulted in a lack of housing stock to serve current residents. Grand Rapids experienced a surge in housing prices starting in 2016 due to an increase in demand and a lack of available housing. Housing price growth accelerated with the pandemic. Existing housing, which has been historically accessible for middle- and low-income families, is now insufficient to meet the needs of changing households and a growing city.

The recommendations in this chapter aim to remove barriers that prevent a neighborhood from evolving over time in response to local needs.

# GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS

## GOAL

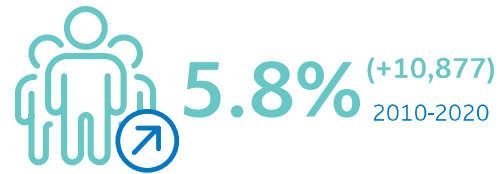
*Connected and diverse neighborhoods where residents can thrive.*

Grand Rapids' neighborhoods will have access to housing, retail, open space, and more that meet the needs of residents in all phases of life.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

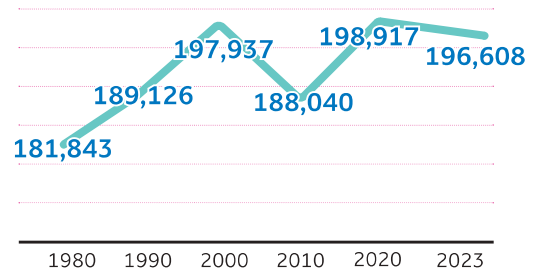
### PUBLIC INPUT

- **Grand Rapids needs more housing.** Housing scarcity and overall affordability were common themes throughout the Community Master Plan (CMP) process. During Round 1, 88% of participants identified housing as a key concern and specifically highlighted the need for more affordable housing and different types of housing.
- **There is a desire for more housing options.** Participants noted the need for more housing types and general support for more density, particularly along larger corridors and near jobs. They encouraged the creation of a variety of affordable housing options including apartments, townhomes, and accessory dwelling units.
- **Housing and building quality vary throughout the city.** Large disparities in housing quality and maintenance were highlighted in comments from the community. Participants noted the need to upgrade older buildings, the lack of resources to maintain aging homes, and a desire to better reuse vacant or underused industrial sites. Participants also highlighted the need for landlord education and ongoing rental regulation. While these topics generally fall outside the land use scope of the CMP, they are linked to the availability of safe and stable housing.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Grand Rapids Population 1980-2020





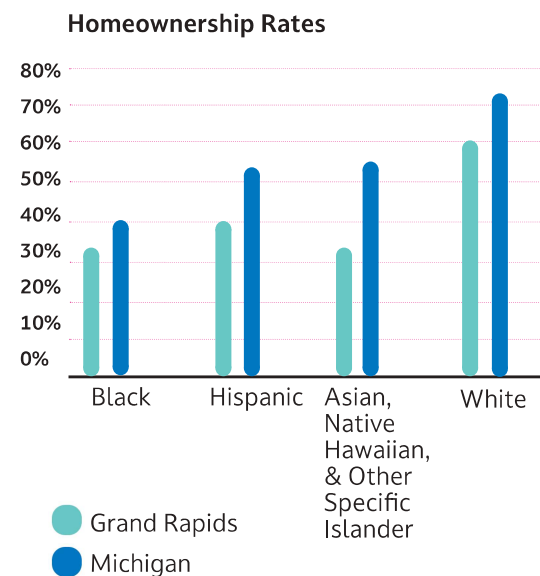
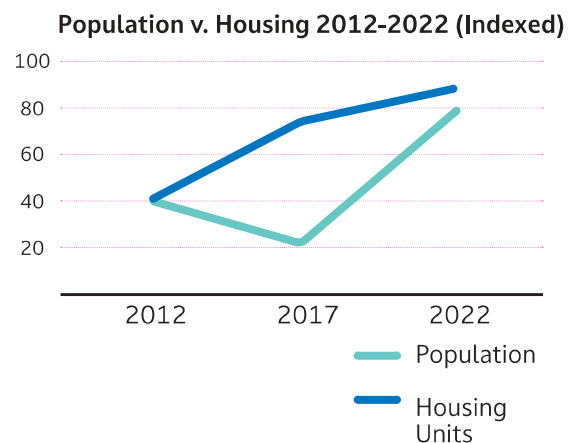
## COMMUNITY PROFILE

- Grand Rapids sits within a county experiencing high population growth.** Grand Rapids is the largest city in Kent County and accounts for 30% of its population. After a short period of decline (5% between 2000 and 2010), the population of Grand Rapids has recovered and is increasing, with new residents partly fueling the city's growth. Additionally, the population of Kent County is expected to grow by about 27% (+169,000 people) by 2045. If Grand Rapids maintains its 30% share of county population, the city will grow to approximately 251,000 residents in that time. In the long term, Michigan is likely to be an attractive destination for climate migrants. In the short term, it is expected that Grand Rapids will need at least 14,000 housing units by 2027 to satisfy demand.
- Households are changing.** The number of non-family households is increasing at a faster rate than the decline of family households. A non-family household consists of a householder living alone (a one-person household) or where the householder shares the home exclusively with people to whom they are not related. This means that it takes more houses to house the same number of people as in the past, and the housing needs of these populations vary greatly.
- Grand Rapids is growing more diverse, but there is a low rate of homeownership within historically marginalized communities.** Homeownership is one factor in social and economic stability in a changing economy. Those priced out of homeownership often end up renting. As rents fluctuate with the market, renters may have less opportunity to build wealth, pay down debt, and save for retirement. While Grand Rapids is more diverse than the county and state, the homeownership rate for the Black, Hispanic, and Asian populations sit at approximately 35-40%, compared to a rate of over 60% within the white population.

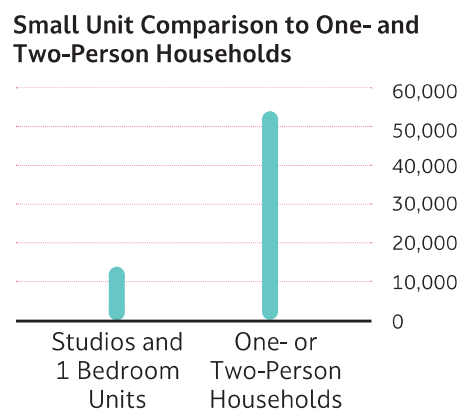
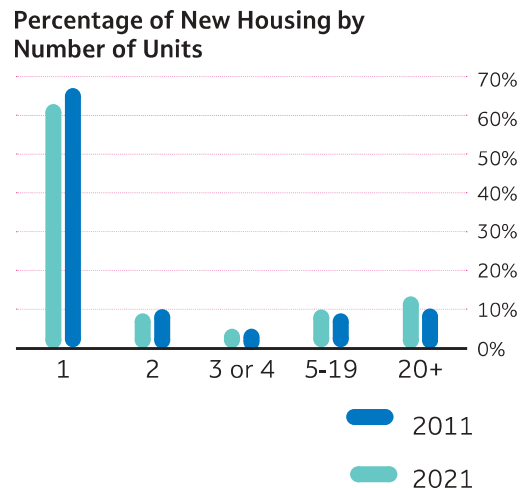
## DEFINED

### CLIMATE MIGRATION

Climate migration is the movement of people due to climate or the effects of climate change. As disasters become more frequent and severe, and as the impacts of sea-level rise and extreme heat become more pronounced, it is increasingly likely that people will move away from more vulnerable areas.



- Single-family homes are the most common type of housing in Grand Rapids.** Almost half of the land area in Grand Rapids is residential, the majority of which (35% of the city) is single-family. In areas with a tight housing supply, like Grand Rapids, there may be opportunities to improve affordability by developing new studio or one-bedroom units. These smaller units could be included in ADUs, duplexes, triplexes, or other structure types. In addition to being less expensive to develop than larger units, the development of smaller units could free up other units by encouraging more one- and two-person households to downsize to the smaller units. In 2022, there were 12,680 studio or one-bedroom units and 52,001 one- and two-person households in Grand Rapids (66% of all households).
- There is a need for housing at all income levels.** The 2022 Grand Rapids and Kent County Housing Needs Assessment cites a need for 4,078 additional rental units priced for households at or below 80% Area Median Income (AMI) and 1,934 owner-occupied homes priced for households at or below 80% AMI by 2027. There is also a need for new housing at market rate prices to ensure that existing housing can remain affordable. Without enough new market rate options, people that can afford those higher price points outcompete others for the older, less expensive housing, which can drive displacement and gentrification.



## DEFINED

### GENTRIFICATION

Gentrification involves the influx of wealthier people into historically under-resourced neighborhoods, which can lead to the displacement of lower-income residents and businesses.

## THE NEED FOR HOUSING FOR ALL INCOME LEVELS

Many cities around the country have developed local housing strategies to address their growing affordability challenges. While expanding the supply of dedicated affordable housing is a critical component, research shows that allowing the broader housing market to respond to increased demand with new construction at other price points is also essential to address rising housing prices.

A study by the New York University Furman Center, titled "Supply Skepticism: Housing Supply and Affordability" concluded that adding new homes moderates price increases, making housing more affordable to low- and moderate-income families.

Housing submarkets (smaller parts of the housing market with similar characteristics, including price) are interrelated. Additions to the housing stock in one submarket can quickly affect prices and rents in other submarkets. For example, if a community does not have enough high-end housing, people searching for housing within that submarket may choose to stay in their current home longer, look elsewhere, or turn to somewhat less expensive housing, increasing demand for housing in the next submarket. Without new supply, the people who want to move to a neighborhood will bid up prices and rents of existing homes.

Building more market-rate housing will not solve the deep affordability challenges faced by low-income households, but, by moderating overall housing prices through increased supply, efforts to reduce barriers to new market-rate construction can help minimize the gap between the price of available homes and what low-income households can afford to pay.



*Housing in  
Grand Rapids*

## HISTORY OF REDLINING IN GRAND RAPIDS

Across the United States, persistent economic and racial segregation means that residents in many different neighborhoods have vastly different opportunities and resources. The causes of segregation are multifaceted, but government policies at the federal, state, and local levels have contributed in significant ways.

In 1937, the Homeowners Loan Corporation (HOLC) created risk maps for home financing for over 200 cities across the country. The risk maps created four color-coded categories, from A to D, into which neighborhoods were rated. Within Grand Rapids, 6 neighborhoods received A ratings, twenty received B ratings, twenty-eight received C ratings, and seven received D ratings (now referred to as red-lined neighborhoods based on the color used in HOLC maps). Residents of neighborhoods labeled C and D, or declining and hazardous neighborhoods, were primarily Black, immigrants, or ethnically diverse. The government agencies and mortgage lenders believed the presence of these homeowners would drive down property values in a neighborhood.

The HOLC, in partnership with the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and private banks, used these risk maps to deny home loans in communities impacted by redlining practices, even when the applicant may have otherwise been eligible for the loan. The FHA continued to use neighborhood composition in drafting its loan underwriting guidelines until 1949.

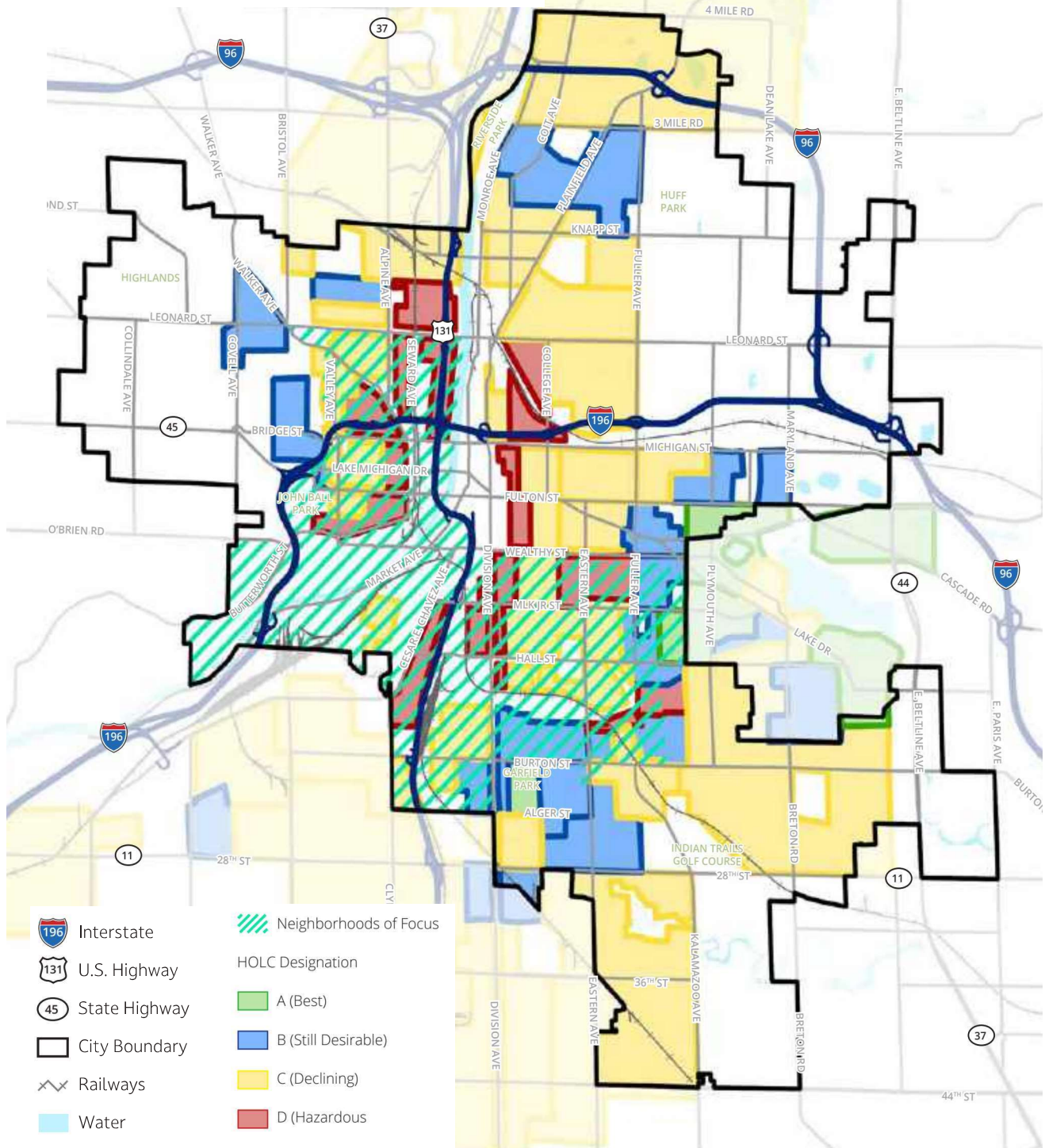
The policies were upheld by local governments which used the maps to direct funds and resources such as public water and sewer to higher-rated neighborhoods, while exclusionary zoning policies were often drafted in a manner that reflected the redlining of previous generations. The biased homebuying market kept Grand Rapids' neighborhoods mostly segregated for decades. A 1964 report from the Grand Rapids Urban League found that 88% of the city's Black families lived within five census tracts of land in the city.

The legacy of these policies continues today and has resulted in large disparities in resources and services while constraining residential choices. Due to systemic and historic inequities, including redlining, residents in Neighborhoods of Focus experience the most disparate outcomes in income, home ownership, and wealth accumulation compared to other Grand Rapids census tracts and the city as a whole. These neighborhoods are identified by the Grand Rapids Office of Equity and Engagement, and include the 17 census tracts in the near west and south side of Grand Rapids (hatched on the HOLC Map on the next page).

Reversing the impacts of redlining is a focus of the City of Grand Rapids and the CMP. Policies in the CMP can help to ensure that neighborhoods deliver a rich set of opportunities by tracking disparities, directing investments in neighborhoods, and identifying opportunities for community partnerships that provide essential services, fostering sustainable development, and empower historically marginalized neighborhoods.



## HOLC MAP OF GRAND RAPIDS WITH CURRENT NEIGHBORHOODS OF FOCUS





## CLIMATE CHANGE

The climate change crisis is one of the City's top concerns. While the City of Grand Rapids has been a leader in environmental sustainability, the impacts of climate change are being felt in Grand Rapids. To avoid the worst impacts, it's necessary to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and plan for known changes and increased extreme weather.

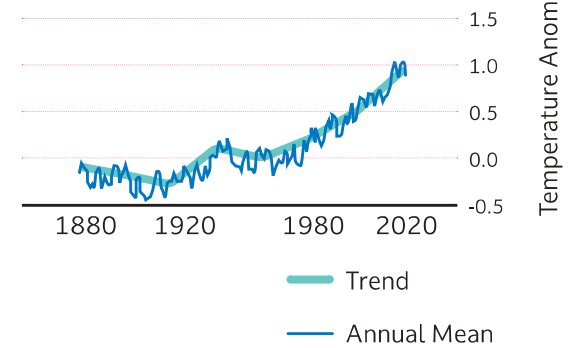
Climate change results in long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. Since the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, mainly due to burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas, as shown in the Global Land-Ocean Temperature Index (right).

The Great Lakes Integrated Sciences and Assessments (GLISA), in partnership with the City, created a summary of historic and projected changes in climate specific to Grand Rapids. This information is valuable in understanding what changes have already been experienced as well as the changes still to come. Anticipated changes include increasing temperature, precipitation, and extreme weather events.

To combat these changes, the City of Grand Rapids adopted science-based targets in Fall of 2022. ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network of > 2,500 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. ICLEI was contracted to measure community-wide emissions and calculate science-based targets (SBT) for emissions reductions. ICLEI recommended preliminary science-based targets of 62.8% per capita greenhouse gas reduction community-wide by 2030 from 2019 emissions, and 100% per capita GHG reduction by 2050 from 2019 emissions.

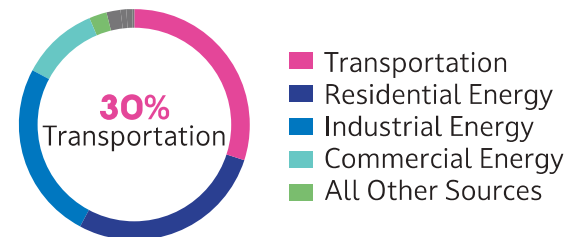
The majority of greenhouse gas emissions come from electricity generation, transportation, buildings, and industry. While City authority over non-governmental emission sources is limited, the City is pursuing this work to act as community leader in this space. The City of Grand Rapids Office of Sustainability collaborated with the Planning Department to emphasize environmental justice and climate mitigation and adaptation in the Community Master Plan. Recommendations in the plan intentionally address affordable housing and transportation equity to center the people and communities most vulnerable to climate impacts.

### Global Land-Ocean Temperature Index



Source: NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS)

### Grand Rapids Emissions At-a-Glance (2019)



### Grand Rapids Science-Based Emission Reduction Targets



Source: City of Grand Rapids

## OBJECTIVES

### 1.A CREATE COMPLETE AND STABLE NEIGHBORHOODS.

Complete neighborhoods provide a mix of housing types in close proximity to Activity Centers, Neighborhood Centers, and corridors and give residents convenient access to daily needs, employment, recreation, and transportation options. Policies that support complete neighborhoods will assist residents in meeting their basic needs and improve access to amenities within their neighborhoods. The City of Grand Rapids has diverse neighborhoods with distinct identities. The sense of community in these neighborhoods is deeply tied to their location, and individuals should have the opportunity to stay in the neighborhoods they're connected to regardless of changes in their age, income, neighborhood, or other life circumstances. Mixed-income neighborhoods, that support a range of incomes and housing types, ensure that a balance is maintained between market-rate and affordable housing units. This helps to promote healthy, successful, and vibrant neighborhoods while ensuring stability. Infill development and redevelopment in line with the community vision in this plan offers opportunities to expand housing options, ensures sensitivity to the existing context or desired future built character of the neighborhood, and improves the quantity, quality, and access to amenities, transportation service, and open space.

### 1.B EXPAND THE VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES AND PRICE POINTS.

According to the 2022 Grand Rapids and Kent County Housing Needs Assessment, significant rental and for-sale housing gaps exist at nearly all price points. Meeting the needs of both current and future households will most likely include building multifamily, duplex, and other missing middle housing alternatives such as cottage courts, pocket neighborhoods, and small homes on small lots. Additional types of housing, especially accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and duplexes, can also create wealth-generating opportunities for residents. These additional units may be used as long-term rentals or multigenerational living spaces, and generally increase property values. These housing types can be compatible in scale with detached single-family homes and provide diverse housing options to meet the needs of different lifestyles and incomes.

### 1.C INTEGRATE SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES INTO DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS.

The City of Grand Rapids should adopt policies and regulations that incentivize practices such as energy reduction, renewable energy installations, rain gardens, green roofs, and protection of trees and vegetation to strengthen neighborhood resilience in the face of a changing climate.

## DEFINED

### COMPLETE NEIGHBORHOODS

A mix of housing types in close proximity to centers and corridors that give residents convenient access to daily needs, employment, recreation, and transportation options. Complete neighborhoods are a desired outcome of a 15-Minute City approach, which makes travel across the city a choice, not a necessity, for meeting everyday needs.



## VALUE THREADS

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1.A CREATE COMPLETE AND STABLE NEIGHBORHOODS.

**1.A.1 Regularly update the Grand Rapids and Kent County Housing Needs Assessment to guide creation and preservation of affordable housing.** Use the Housing Needs Assessment to set a subsequent target number of units for development and preservation. Connect existing organizations, programs, and tools that create and preserve quality affordable housing to developers who would benefit from services already available.



**1.A.2 Implement design guidelines that build upon existing neighborhood development.** Encourage development that responds to and enhances the general scale, character, and natural features of neighborhoods through regulation of design in new development. Consider building forms, scale, street frontage relationships, setbacks, open space patterns, landscaping, and architectural styles.



**1.A.3 Improve the relationship between higher-intensity and lower-intensity uses.** Adopt zoning requirements that support transitions in building scale in locations where higher-density and higher-intensity development is adjacent to smaller-scale single-dwellings. This includes using missing middle housing as a transition between high-density mixed-use areas and low-density residential neighborhoods. Ensure new high-density and large-scale infill development incorporates design elements that soften transitions in scale and limit light and privacy impacts on adjacent residents. Landscaping, setbacks, step-backs, and other design elements should be considered in respect to zoning lines to ease the transition.



**1.A.4 Ensure public information about development is easy to access.** Ensure residents can access information on all infill development proposals over a certain size, including those approved administratively. Continue to use publicly accessible platforms as a central source of information on planning applications. Evaluate the Development with Us (DwUs) program and consider permanently funding the program.



**1.A.5 Develop an anti-displacement strategy.** Explore tools and strategies for protecting residents at risk of displacement. Tools included in the overall strategy may include:



- Support and coordinate holding land in reserve for affordable housing as an anti-displacement tool, and for other community development purposes. This may be accomplished with community land trusts or land banks.
- Increase efforts to make homeowners aware of programs that mitigate the impacts of rising property values on lower-income households, particularly in neighborhoods where housing costs are rapidly appreciating.

**1.A.6 Streamline the process to create condominium forms of ownership.** Consider working with local/regional banks to address Federal Housing Administration (FHA) requirements for condo ownership. This could include partnerships to provide construction financing and implement strategies that support sales.

## DEFINED

### AFFORDABLE HOUSING

There are two main kinds of affordable housing:  
1.) dedicated affordable housing units that come with binding rent and/or income restrictions to ensure it is occupied by low-income households and

2.) market affordable housing units that rent or sell at an affordable price but have no binding restrictions. Market affordable housing is generally affordable to households earning between 80-120% of the area median income. This chapter includes recommendations for both.

## DEVELOPING AN ANTI-DISPLACEMENT STRATEGY

Rising rents, or property taxes to a lesser extent, can make it difficult or impossible for residents to afford to remain in their homes. In many instances, displaced residents and businesses struggle to find comparably affordable locations that meet their needs and desires. The resulting housing instability and insecurity can adversely impact their overall well-being. To combat this displacement and promote inclusive growth, localities can develop an anti-displacement strategy in neighborhoods experiencing rising rents and home prices. A key goal of an anti-displacement strategy is to maximize existing residents' choices about when or if they move, preserving their ability to stay in their homes and neighborhoods if they wish to do so.

Local Housing Solutions, managed and updated by the NYU Furman Center's Housing Solutions Lab, provides a four-pronged approach to creating this type of strategy:

- **Plan** ahead to identify the neighborhoods (or other areas) where action may be needed to preserve affordable housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income households.
- **Protect** long-term residents from the adverse effects of rising rents and home prices.
- **Preserve** existing affordable housing.
- **Produce** additional dedicated affordable housing for low- and moderate-income households.

Recommendation 1.A.5



**1.A.7 Advocate for removal of state-level barriers to housing**

**affordability and stability.** Advocate for and support legislation to amend state restrictions on inclusionary housing policies. Support policies that work to create permanently affordable housing and/or mitigate the impacts of market pressures that cause involuntary displacement.

**1.A.8 Provide adequate resources to meet community needs.**

Align City budget and investments with the needs of the growing Grand Rapids community while continuing to assist historically marginalized property owners. Ensure that increasing density and intensifying development patterns are balanced with the City's ability to provide services, including infrastructure, public safety, and code enforcement

**1.A.9 Support efforts to provide small-scale developer training to residents.**

Support and help staff opportunities for Grand Rapids residents to learn the skills to become small developers, with a focus on how to build great places incrementally, to diversify who benefits from neighborhood development. Support efforts to provide or expand access to capital for homeowners and small-scale developers who want to build missing middle housing.

**1.A.10 Work with the larger metropolitan community to provide safe,**

**stable, and affordable housing options.** Meeting the challenge of providing safe, stable, and affordable housing options for all income levels requires coordinated action and public-private partnerships.



Coordinate plans and investments with programs that prevent avoidable, involuntary evictions and foreclosures. Participate in regional housing plans with neighboring cities and townships and Kent County.

**1.B EXPAND THE VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES AND PRICE POINTS.****1.B.1 Support programs that expand housing diversity based on income and housing types.**

Where there are opportunities, coordinate programs to encourage more mixed-income projects. Build creative incentive tools and programs to promote a variety of housing choices.



- Partner with the development community to identify the most impactful tools and current barriers related to delivery of missing middle housing.

**1.B.2 Allow a greater variety of housing types in low-density residential zone districts.**



Ensure continued viability and regulatory compliance of naturally occurring affordable housing, preserve the existing supply of middle-density housing, and encourage development of new housing types. Allow duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and ADUs by-right in zoning districts where single-family housing is allowed.

**1.B.3 Allow higher density residential in the Mid-Century and Modern Era neighborhoods.**



In line with the Vital Streets Plan, increase density in neighborhoods where adequate transportation infrastructure is provided. Consider allowing up to six units on lots fronting Link Residential and Network Residential streets, per the Vital Streets Plan, in all zones where single-family detached dwellings are permitted. New housing should align with the Future Character Map. For example, cottage clusters may be an appropriate solution for neighborhoods where large parcels are available for development.

**1.B.4 Assess and reduce barriers to innovative housing solutions (such as modular construction, prefabricated materials, and new building methods).**



Evaluate opportunities to facilitate development of tiny homes, modular housing, and co-housing, as well as innovative construction and delivery methods such as prefabrication, 3D printing, and other emerging technologies. Ensure innovative housing products meet basic development standards (e.g., setbacks, form) to ensure consistent development character within neighborhoods. Consider establishing a residential pattern book for innovative housing products, and working with local architects and residents to create a building permit template consistent with the pattern book that facilitates code review and approvals.

**1.B.5 Continue to increase homeownership opportunities.** Current efforts to improve and strengthen affordability should be continued.



- Educate residents on home purchase down payment programs available to low- and moderate-income buyers and first-time homebuyers from the city and state.
- Support efforts to leverage publicly owned land for affordable housing development. Coordinate across City departments to evaluate public lands for suitability for affordable housing development. Explore partnerships with other City departments to prioritize and set standards for use of publicly owned land for affordable housing.

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## THE BENEFITS OF MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

“Missing middle housing” refers to housing types that fall somewhere in between a single-family home and mid-rise apartment buildings such as townhomes, duplexes, and triplexes. Allowing missing middle housing can help municipalities, with neighborhoods dominated by single-family homes, increase the availability of less expensive housing types and support vibrant, walkable neighborhoods, while gently increasing density. These housing types are an important component of a diverse housing stock, which contribute to more inclusive and affordable neighborhoods.

Increasing the stock of missing middle housing requires a comprehensive approach to facilitate its development. There may be barriers to constructing these housing types related to zoning regulations, approval processes, developer capacity, and cost for homeowners and small-scale developers. A complete strategy is one that makes missing middle development both allowable and feasible.

Missing middle housing types are compatible in scale with detached single-family homes. The next page shows some common missing middle housing types with a brief description of their design.

Learn more about the different missing middle housing types, template designs, and profiles of successful initiatives in the US and internationally at [missingmiddlehousing.com](https://missingmiddlehousing.com)

## DUPLEX

A small- to medium-sized structure consisting of two dwelling units, either side-by-side or stacked one on top of the other, which face the street and have separate entrances.



## FOURPLEX

A medium-sized structure which consists of four dwelling units, typically stacked with two on the ground floor and two above, that face a street and may be accessed through a shared entrance.



## COTTAGE CLUSTER

A series of small, detached units arranged around a shared courtyard that is perpendicular to the street. The shared courtyard replaces private backyards.



## TOWNHOUSE

A small- to medium-sized structure consisting of usually three to eight attached single-family homes placed side-by-side. Each townhome faces the street and are accessed by a private entrance.



Photos: Sightline Institute



## THE USE OF PUBLICLY OWNED LAND FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Local governments, school districts, or other public entities may own underutilized properties with vacant buildings or buildings that are no longer useful for their original purpose. These properties often present an opportunity to expand the supply of affordable housing. Through development partnerships or sale of development rights, these sites may be redeveloped to better serve the community. Properties may be made available at no cost or a reduced cost to developers that commit to specific requirements or that agree to redevelop in a way that combines the original use (e.g., a school or a community center) with other community benefits like affordable housing.

High land costs can make it difficult to create new affordable housing for low- or moderate-income households, particularly in high-value, amenity-rich locations. In addition to redevelopment, local jurisdictions can also build considerations for affordable housing and other community-serving uses into the disposition process for surplus land and buildings. With this approach, sites are considered on a case-by-case basis when determining whether to prioritize affordable housing or another purpose. These decisions should be based on clear criteria—for example, proximity to schools, jobs, public transit, and other services—as well as characteristics that might make development for a specific purpose undesirable or difficult.

This approach may include sites that will continue to be used for their current purpose but could be developed more intensively, such as low-density buildings where additional floors could be added, or surface parking lots could be redeveloped.

Where a site has been determined to be inappropriate for residential use, or where the City, school district, or other public owner places a priority on receiving fair market value for the land, there are still opportunities to support affordable housing. City policy can require that a share of the proceeds from the sale of any publicly owned land be used to support affordable housing activities.

As a starting point, cities can create and maintain a surplus land inventory with key attributes of desirable parcels, making it easier to quickly identify sites that might be good candidates for affordable housing.

### 1.B.6 Support Community Development efforts described in the



**Community Development fair housing plan.** The study examined the most common traits associated with strong neighborhoods to determine if barriers existed for certain groups or geographic areas in Grand Rapids and Kent County that might limit access to fair housing choice. Using this information, support and advocate for initiatives that provide access to housing for persons with disabilities, including those with mobility impairments, mental health challenges, and developmental and intellectual disabilities.

## 1.C INTEGRATE SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES INTO DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS.

### 1.C.1 Encourage designs for new or substantially remodeled housing units that improve access for people with limited mobility. A



house is visitable when it meets three basic requirements: one zero-step entrance, doors with 32 inches of clear passage space, and one wheelchair-accessible bathroom on the main floor.



Connect residents and developers to organizations and programs experienced with home modification options and those that understand the needs of older or physically disabled people.



### 1.C.2 Continue to enhance community assets through additional



**investments.** Prioritize investments in free, equitable, and accessible community gathering spaces and public parks, especially in disadvantaged communities. Engage residents in the planning process to ensure these spaces reflect community needs and promote inclusivity. Prioritize sustainable practices and partnerships to ensure long-term viability and impact.



## AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

According to the 2020 Census, one in six people in the United States were 65 and older, and Michigan is one of the most rapidly aging states in the country. AARP estimates that the number of Michiganders 60 years and older is growing by 50,000 each year.

The City of Grand Rapids 2021 Regional Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice reports that 2019 data shows 13.3% of Grand Rapids residents as being 65 or older, and 12.8% of Grand Rapids population as having a disability. Ambulatory and independent living difficulties are the leading disabilities in Grand Rapids, which have a significant impact on an individual's transportation and housing options.

In January 2024, the Grand Rapids Age-Friendly Action Plan was formally approved by AARP, and Grand Rapids was renewed as a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities.

**1.C.3 Ensure an equitable distribution of public parks and recreational facilities.**

Work to create a connected network of parks, natural areas, and waterways that is accessible to all residents. Support the Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan, which provides neighborhood priorities and outlines areas of the city that are historically deficient in municipal parks facilities. Support acquisition of parkland in these park-deficient areas and efforts to activate these spaces in culturally relevant ways to help improve a sense of security for adjacent residents. This includes creating programs and projects that ensure the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of all residents.

**1.C.4 Support implementation of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP).**

Participate fully in the actions recommended by the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, including the subsequent implementation plan. Use the science based targets established when evaluating updates to the CMP.

**1.C.5 Improve accessibility to fresh foods throughout the community, with a focus on food deserts and economically challenged neighborhoods.**

Promote full-service grocery stores that will increase access to fresh and affordable food in neighborhoods with less access. The zoning code should be reviewed, and amendments considered, that reduce upfront development costs and encourage local neighborhood-based businesses that can address food desert needs. Support the priorities of the Kent County Food Systems Assessment & Plan related to the City of Grand Rapids, which includes priorities outlined by the City's Urban Agriculture Committee related to food accessibility.

**1.C.6 Continue to support community gardens and promote an edible landscape.**

Community gardens are an appropriate land use in neighborhoods and the City should promote an edible landscape on appropriate public properties, including parks. The Urban Agriculture Committee recommendations should be implemented regarding greenhouses/hoophouses, permit fees, composting, and farm stands, in coordination with community groups for management and maintenance. Consider code amendments that permit urban agriculture as a primary, accessory, or special/conditional use in all zoning districts to support urban agricultural practices on properties across the city.

**1.C.7 Expand City programs to support sustainable housing.**

Gaps in funding and eligibility for funding for retrofit projects can create barriers to regular housing maintenance. Support the pursuit of funding for weatherization, energy efficiency, and water conservation measures for all, especially lower-income residents, and small business owners, both in new construction and retrofits to existing buildings.

- 1.C.8 Continue to promote the use of green infrastructure on individual home sites.** Support programs and funding sources that promote the use of green infrastructure. Expand public education on the benefits of rain gardens, native plants, infiltration basins, rain barrels, and vegetation for stormwater management.



- 1.C.9 Promote native plant use in home landscapes.** Consider adoption of a Landscape Manual, referenced within the Zoning Ordinance, to capture evolving best practices and provide guidance for projects subject to landscaping standards. Evaluate recommended plantings and include plants that are suited for warmer climates, to account for the changing climate. Identify opportunities to promote technical assistance (e.g., Kent Conservation District, Michigan State University Extension, Wild Ones, Lower Grand River Organizations of Watersheds, Plaster Creek Stewards, etc.).



- 1.C.10 Continue to work towards the City's 40% tree canopy goal.** Trees help to offset the impact of greenhouse gases, provide shade, minimize the urban heat island effect, and contribute to a more comfortable walking environment. Implementation of this strategy will occur over time as the existing tree canopy is maintained and new development and infill provide additions through on-site landscaping. Tree replacement in publicly owned spaces and management of the urban forest are critical ongoing tree canopy development. Continue to support related green space goals of the Urban Forestry Committee.



- 1.C.11 Support facilities that locally generate and distribute energy.** Support a distributed model for renewable energy production and distribution. Work with utility providers to address the need for and inclusion of on-site solar and wind production, bio-digestion, micro-grid and neighborhood-based storage and distribution, electric vehicle charging stations (public and privately located), and similar measures as the renewable energy landscape continues to evolve.



- 1.C.12 Continue to encourage voluntary community benefits agreements.** Encourage the use of voluntary community benefits agreements between developers, neighborhood groups, and the City. Work with projects receiving funding from public sources to ensure that impacted communities benefit from associated amenities, recreational facilities, and employment opportunities. Identify resources to support this strategy and establish a structure to enforce and implement agreements. Consider partnerships with organizations, such as Neighborhood Associations, that can support communities with resources, time, and/or expertise.





## 2. VITAL BUSINESS DISTRICTS



Business districts serve many vital roles. They are critical components of complete neighborhoods, where residents can find most of what they need in terms of goods and services nearby. They generate local growth and opportunities, vibrant neighborhoods, stronger communities, and more viable local businesses. In many cases, these districts also provide community gathering places and contribute to the identity of the surrounding community.

Neighborhoods and business districts depend on one another. People need close access to personal and essential services while businesses need a strong customer and client base to succeed. The recommendations in this chapter support essential elements and functions of vital business districts that will enhance them as anchors of complete neighborhoods.

# VITAL BUSINESS DISTRICTS

## GOAL

**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 of all ages.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

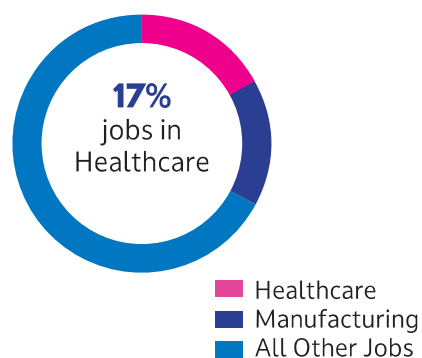
### PUBLIC INPUT

- **Residents want to see better walkability and more public space.** Participants noted opportunities for public areas, green spaces, or amenities that benefit the community as a whole. There is general support for the creation of more pedestrian-friendly environments and walkable neighborhoods that increase economic activity, improve public health, and foster a stronger sense of community.

### COMMUNITY PROFILE

- **Grand Rapids has a diverse economy with significant employment in several key sectors.** The healthcare and social assistance industry employs about 17% of the workforce, reflecting the city's strong medical infrastructure. Manufacturing remains vital, accounting for approximately 12% of jobs, driven by a robust automotive and furniture manufacturing presence.
- **Density is a significant driver of the local economy.** The City depends on taxable land to cover the costs of everything from infrastructure to emergency services, and a little over 10% of Grand Rapids' budget comes from property tax revenue. Land-use efficiency can be determined by taking the assessed value of a property and dividing it by the total amount of land it uses. As a result, overall, more compact developments produce higher revenues for cities than other patterns.

Major Employment Sectors





## DENSITY AND REVENUE

More compact, infill projects produce higher revenues than other development patterns.

### Suburban Development Pattern.

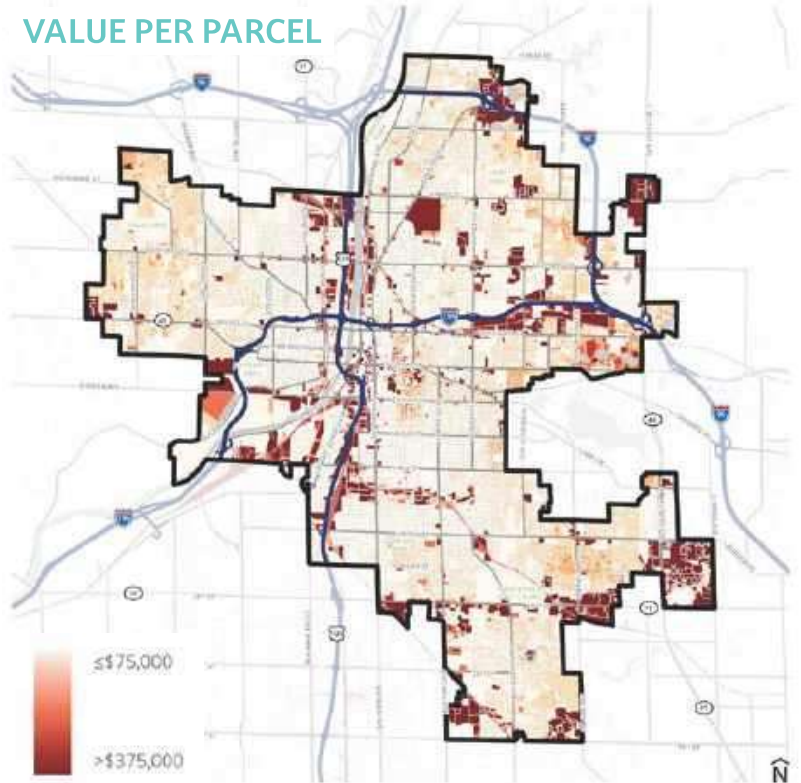
Large lots with frequent curb cuts, buildings set far away from the street, and parking in front creates a suburban development pattern that prioritizes the automobile and large-scale development.



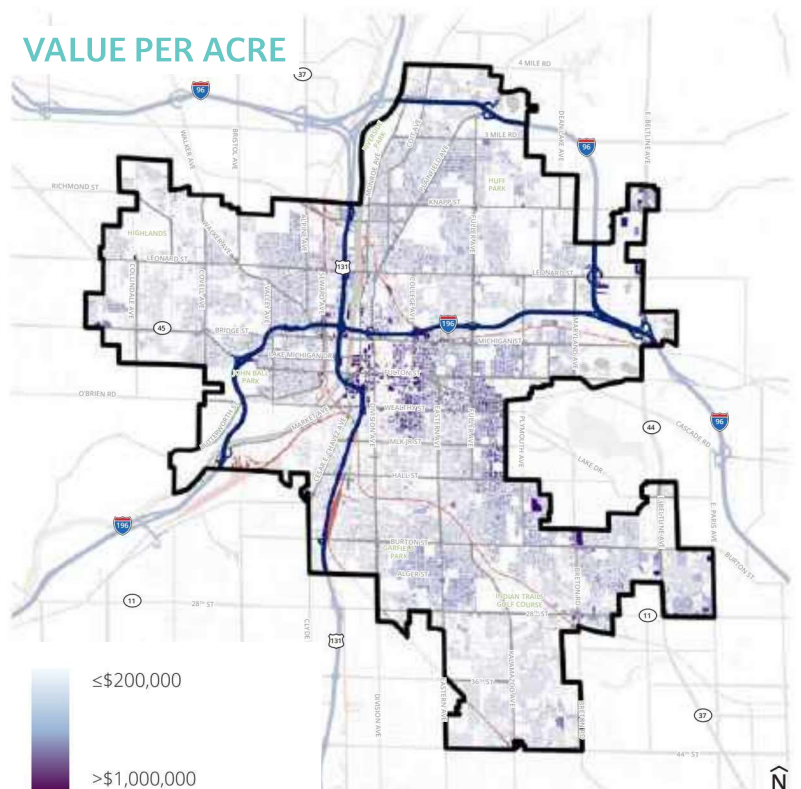
**Urban Development Pattern.** Narrow lots with alleys, buildings that are close to the street, and parking that is hidden behind the building work together to create a high-value development pattern that supports walkability.



## VALUE PER PARCEL



## VALUE PER ACRE





- **The Grand Rapids area is ranked 9th among US large metros for small business employment.** According to the US Census, over half of Grand Rapids workers (50.4%) were employed by small businesses in 2020. Grand Rapids was home to 19,092 small businesses, defined by the Census Bureau as having fewer than 500 employees.

## OBJECTIVES

### 2.A SUPPORT COMPACT CENTERS THAT PROVIDE A MIX OF USES.

Business districts range in scale from downtown Grand Rapids to small Neighborhood Centers that provide local access to services. Vital business districts anchor complete neighborhoods with retail stores, civic amenities, housing options, health clinics, daycare centers, employment centers, plazas, parks, senior centers, and other public gathering places. The Community Master Plan supports a range of business districts across the city to enhance local, equitable access to services.

### 2.B IMPROVE THE ACCESSIBILITY OF ALL BUSINESS DISTRICTS.

Business districts and corridors vary in character, services provided, and primary purposes. The CMP recommendations work to enhance the function of business districts to improve neighborhood livability and accessibility to create a more walkable and inclusive city.

### 2.C BROADEN AND ENHANCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL SERVICES, AMENITIES, AND CULTURAL ASSETS.

Policies that strengthen and expand cultural and neighborhood assets can bring vitality to these districts. Stable and thriving districts celebrate and promote neighborhood assets, create a sense of inclusion, and give new and long-time residents more vibrant places to work, shop, play, learn, and do business.

## TOP 10 CITIES FOR SMALL BUSINESS EMPLOYMENT

1. New Orleans-Metairie, Louisiana
2. Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, Florida
3. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
4. Providence-Warwick, Rhode Island-Massachusetts
5. New York-Newark-Jersey City, New York-New Jersey-Pennsylvania
6. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, California
7. Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, Oregon-Washington
8. Buffalo-Cheektowaga-Niagara Falls, New York
9. **Grand Rapids-Wyoming, Michigan**
10. San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward, California

## VALUE THREADS

CULTURE



EQUITY



SAFETY



SUSTAINABILITY



VIBRANCY



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 2.A SUPPORT COMPACT CENTERS THAT PROVIDE A MIX OF USES.

- 2.A.1 Update the zoning ordinance to encourage density in areas that serve residents and businesses.** Evaluate the zoning within areas designated as Activity Centers on the Future Character Map to ensure the assigned districts match characteristics discussed in the Plan. Activity Centers are mixed-use areas, typically along transit corridors or major roadways, that provide, or aspire to provide, goods, services, dining, entertainment, and housing. Continue to zone these areas to provide a broad range of services and higher-density housing to support demand for commercial uses and more walkable access for customers.



- 2.A.2 Direct dense development downtown and in areas and corridors served by regional transit routes.** The GR Forward Downtown & River Action Plan, adopted in 2015, called for increasing the downtown residential population to 10,000 people. Evaluate and update this number to significantly increase the downtown population goal. Increased density, particularly concentrated downtown and along major corridors, can set the stage for future transit improvements such as Bus Rapid Transit or light rail. Coordinate land use with broader regional transit efforts, such as The Rapid Transit Master Plan. Consider setting minimum Floor Area Ratio (FAR), residential densities, and/or number of stories on sites within a certain distance of transit routes to ensure these areas are developed to an appropriate density.



**2.A.3 Support infill development at an appropriate scale.**

Infill development is critical to building commercial areas and neighborhoods to create vibrant mixed-use places. More intensive infill is appropriate in the downtown, along major road corridors, at key intersections, and adjacent to other development concentrations, such as the nodes identified in the Conceptual Development Framework. Infill developments should be compatible with the surrounding character. Such developments can support local neighborhood businesses, reinforce walkability, are an efficient use of land, create additional housing opportunities in neighborhoods, and reduce traffic impacts.

**2.A.4 Support taller commercial buildings in commercial districts.**

Consider raising the maximum height of commercial buildings in the Mid-Century (MCN) and Modern Era (MON) neighborhood classifications and Neighborhood Office Service (NOS) zone district to encourage densification in these commercial districts. Mixed-use approaches to these new buildings are supported as well.

**2.A.5 Update the zoning ordinance to address the impacts of continued growth in business districts.**

Regularly evaluate the Zoning Ordinance to respond to changing trends and pressures in business districts. This may include:

- Additional guidance for self-storage facilities when integrated within active-use buildings.
- Additional guidance on fulfillment centers, gas stations, and other auto-centric uses.
- Additional opportunities for small businesses (home occupation, micro-businesses, or live-work units) in more areas of the city.
- Amenity requirements (e.g., bicycle rooms, locker rooms, showers, electric vehicle charging station, or package lockers).
- More expansive and flexible temporary use allowances in commercial mixed-use zone districts to activate underutilized sites.

**2.B IMPROVE THE ACCESSIBILITY OF BUSINESS DISTRICTS.****2.B.1 Require a plan to encourage people to use modes of transportation other than driving alone when large developments are proposed within nodes identified in the Conceptual Development Framework.**

Transportation and parking demand management encompasses a variety of strategies to encourage more efficient use of the existing transportation system and reduce reliance on the personal automobile. Consider zoning requirements for new development or alterations to buildings over a unit count and/or gross floor area threshold to provide a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) plan. Provide a standard agreement in lieu of a custom plan to account for emerging and first time developers.

**DEFINED****INFILL DEVELOPMENT**

The development of new housing or other buildings/uses on scattered vacant or underutilized sites in a built-up area.

## TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT (TDM) IN PORTLAND, OR

TDM is the practice of providing residents, employees, and visitors information and incentives to walk, bicycle, ride transit, and carpool while discouraging drive-alone trips. TDM strategies have several benefits including subsidizing transit passes, bicycle commute reimbursements, and providing encouragement information to residents and employees.

There are several benefits that come along with TDM strategies including reduced transportation costs and enhanced mobility options for residents, mitigation of neighborhood parking impacts, and greenhouse gas emission reduction citywide.

As part of a zoning code update, the City of Portland adopted a new TDM requirement that applied to a subset of development within the newly designated Commercial/Mixed Use Zones. A development in this zone that includes more than 10 new dwelling units and is close to transit is required to have a TDM Plan approved prior to the issuance of a building permit.

There are two options for a developer to meet the TDM Plan requirement:

1. **Pre-Approved TDM Plan.** This administrative option requires a financial incentive equivalent in value to an annual transit pass per unit, due at building permit issuance. Owners/developers are required to provide transportation options information and an annual survey to their residents to assess the impact/relevance of the options provided.
2. **Custom TDM Plan.** This option requires an applicant to develop a TDM Plan and implement approved TDM strategies. Plans are approved through a discretionary land use review process and the plan must demonstrate how the TDM strategies will contribute to achieving the City's mode share and residential auto ownership targets in order to be approved.



## REIMAGINING AUTO-DOMINATED CORRIDORS

Across the United States, cities are looking for ways to become more attractive to investors, competitive for new businesses, livable for residents, and exciting to visitors. They aspire to be vibrant, equitable, and sustainable places, with a mix of uses and a variety of transportation options.

However, nearly every community across the country is challenged by the presence of automobile-centric commercial corridors. These corridors typically feature a wide road with multiple lanes; high-speed traffic; nonexistent or limited transit service; buildings separated from the street by large parking lots; a lack of trees and vegetation; and sidewalks that are narrow, in poor condition, interrupted with driveway curb cuts, and unbuffered from the travel lanes. In Grand Rapids, these corridors include Plainfield Avenue, 28th Street, and East Beltline Avenue.

Streets with large parcels and many property owners do not develop all at once and changing an auto-dominated corridor takes time and coordination. Infrastructure improvements, strategic land use policies, and sustainable financial support are all important elements for success. The zoning code is particularly important. Sections of the corridor may be better situated to support residential, while key intersections are ideal for concentrated commercial areas. This prevents over-zoning from happening as denser development starts taking place. Further, capital improvement programs that upgrade infrastructure for large sections of the corridor can help prevent the disconnection that results from piecemeal redevelopment.

Example: Columbia Pike in Arlington County, Virginia stretched more than three miles, lined with drive-through restaurants and banks, convenience stores, and strip malls. In an effort to change the character of this major road, the County adopted two codes designed to kick-start development. Within the codes are requirements for street planning and standards for building envelopes, streetscapes, and architecture. For example, within commercial areas, buildings are required to have street frontage, first-floor retail space, and built-in bicycle amenities. The Columbia Pike Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Area was also established as a funding mechanism. The TIF dedicates 25% of incremental new tax revenue generated by new development and increasing property value to affordable housing along the corridor. Columbia Pike is now the busiest bus transit corridor in Virginia, with bus lines that have increased ridership and frequency and that connect to the nearby transit station. The corridor also features two walking loops, “bicycle boulevards” on adjacent streets, bicycle racks, and six bikeshare stations.

## BEFORE

Before code changes, strip malls and other developments along auto-dominated corridors catered to drivers.



Photo: Urban Land Institute



Photo: Urban Land Institute

## AFTER

Parking relocated from the front to the back of developments helps create a better environment for pedestrians and bicyclists, while roadway improvements create safer space for people.

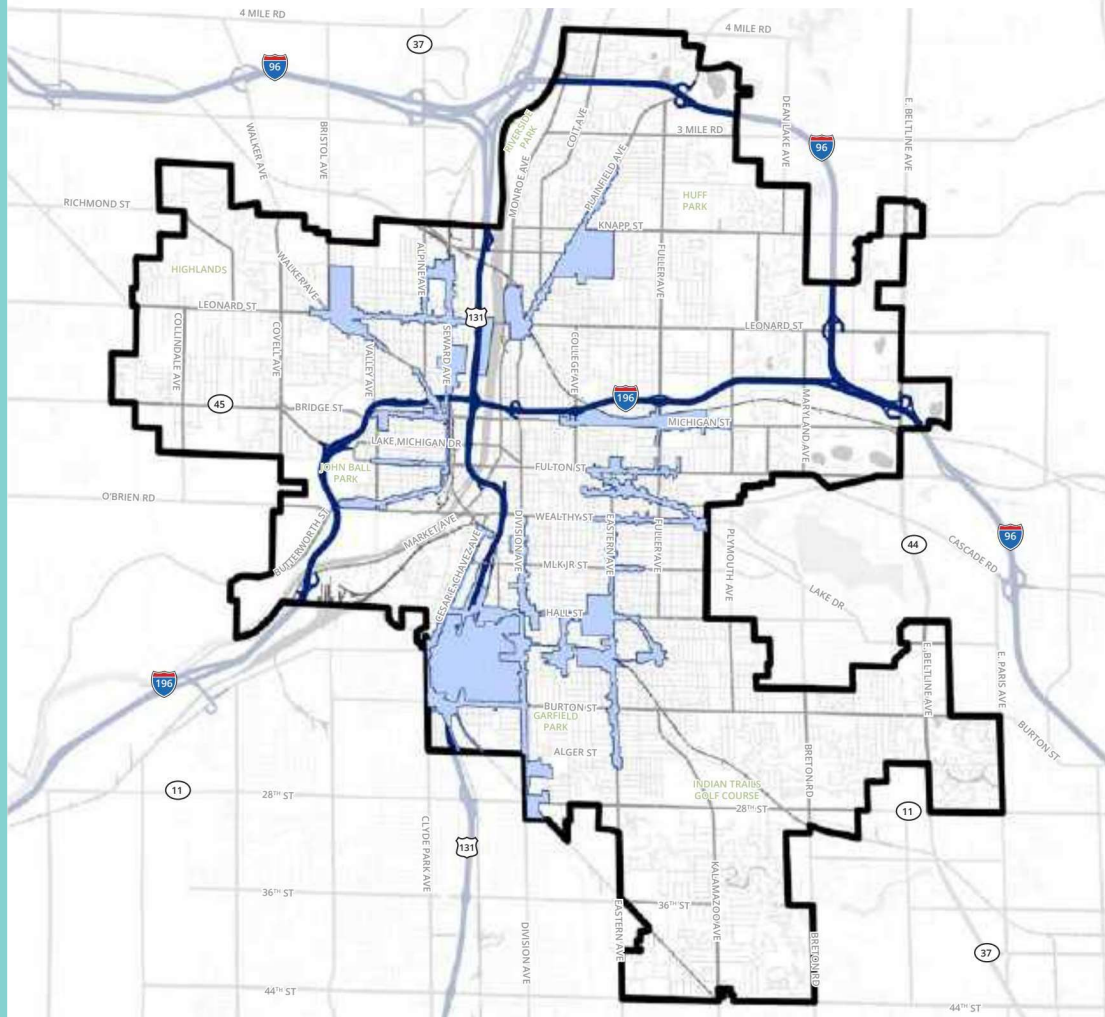


Photo: Urban Land Institute



Photo: Arlington County

## AREAS COVERED BY CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT AUTHORITIES



### CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT AUTHORITIES

The Corridor Improvement Authority Act (Public Act 208 of 2005) helps communities plan for and fund improvements along a corridor. The overall goal is to support economic development and redevelopment of an area. Once created, a Corridor Improvement Authority may hire a director, establish a tax increment financing plan, levy special assessments, and issue revenue bonds and notes. The CIA Board is made up of local business leaders that make decisions about investments within the corridor. Current Corridor Improvement Authorities include Michigan Street, North Quarter South, Division/Grandville Avenue, Southtown, Uptown, and WestSide.

Recommendation 2.C.2

- 2.B.2 Set maximum block sizes within Community Activity Centers identified on the Future Character and Land Use Map.** As sites redevelop, introduce new connections, including streets, to break up large blocks. Consider additional incentives for walkways, landscaping, and plazas on sites over a certain size in Community Activity Centers. These incremental changes would apply to auto-dominated areas, such as 28th Street and Plainfield Avenue, and help to improve bicycle and pedestrian circulation and access to available transit.



## 2.C BROADEN AND ENHANCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL SERVICES, AMENITIES, AND CULTURAL ASSETS.

- 2.C.1 Evaluate strategies to protect significant community structures.**



Encourage the adaptive reuse of significant community structures, such as former schools, meeting halls, and places of worship, for arts, cultural, and community uses that continue their role as anchors for the community. New or secondary uses may include residential, where appropriate.

- 2.C.2 Increase the capacity of the City's Corridor Improvement Authorities (CIA) to have more meaningful impacts in their districts.** A CIA uses tax increment financing (TIF) dollars to make capital improvements within established commercial districts and can be a powerful tool to use the community's voice to guide and shape the success of business districts. As the existing CIAs' revenues increase, they will have increasing opportunities to make impactful investments and should be provided with the necessary administrative and technical support to leverage these opportunities.



- 2.C.3 Continue to support private sector investments in sustainable infrastructure.** Support the Grand Rapids 2030 District and similar public-private programs. The city-wide initiative brings the public and private sectors together for common goals: carbon drawdown, increased marketability, stormwater management, and community vibrancy. Provide grants to private entities to offset the costs of third-party verifications like LEED and Energy Star.



- 2.C.4 Continue to support public art championed by community organizations.** Enhance the public realm and encourage cultural expression and placemaking downtown and in residential neighborhoods, parks, and other public spaces, including along the river. Promote and participate in collaborative efforts to strengthen the resilience and impact of local artists and arts venues, organizations, and institutions.





# 3. A STRONG ECONOMY

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Grand Rapids is the economic hub of West Michigan and manufacturing remains the heart of the local economy. Grand Rapids, or the region, is home to some of the nation's largest industry concentrations in metals, plastics, biopharmaceuticals, medical devices, production technology, automotive manufacturing, office furniture production, and food processing. Grand Rapids also boasts one of the fastest-growing medical device and life sciences clusters in the U.S. along the Medical Mile. With more than 20 colleges and universities in the region, there is a wealth of local talent to grow and diversify the economic base of the city.

As Grand Rapids continues to experience growth, the recommendations in this chapter support a strong and resilient economy with diverse opportunities to find or create a job that is appealing and provides a livable wage. The recommendations in this chapter support the City's vision while advancing and building upon the work of local and regional economic development organizations like The Right Place.

# A STRONG ECONOMY

## GOAL

**An economy that offers a prosperous quality of life.**

Grand Rapids' economy will offer a range of employers and job choices so that everyone has the opportunity to access and earn a living wage.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

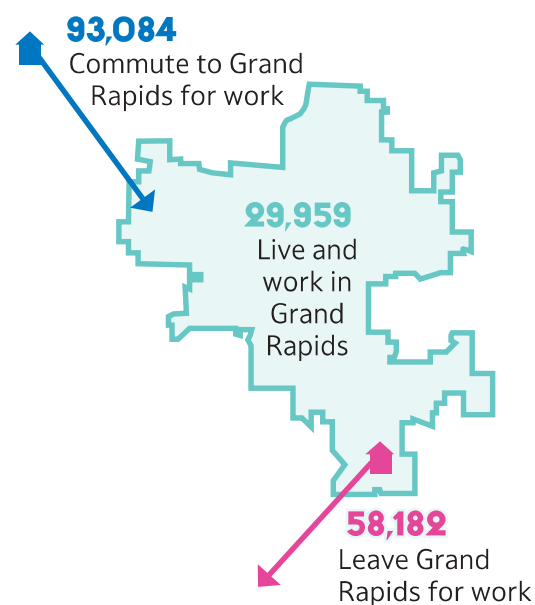
### PUBLIC INPUT

- **Residents in Grand Rapids often look outside the city for employment opportunities.** Many people make employment decisions based on the perceived availability of job opportunities. Residents noted a desire for more career advancement opportunities and professional growth. Notably, nearly 60,000 Grand Rapids residents leave the city for work, while approximately 30,000 people both live and work in the city. Over 93,000 people commute to the city for work, demonstrating that the city is the heart of the larger economic region.
- **Manufacturing requires a balanced approach.** Many residents emphasized the importance of manufacturing for job creation, economic diversity, and noted the historical significance of industry in Grand Rapids. There was general support for cleaner industries and accessible public transportation options to employment centers.

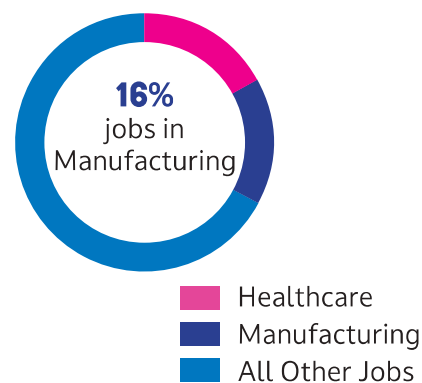
### COMMUNITY PROFILE

- **Grand Rapids' workforce has become increasingly diverse.** Between 2009 and 2019, the percentage of the workforce comprised of Black, Asian, and Hispanic workers increased for each group. However, a racial income gap persists between White workers and most BIPOC groups, with Black workers earning approximately 33% less than the average median income across all groups.

### Employment Inflow/Outflow

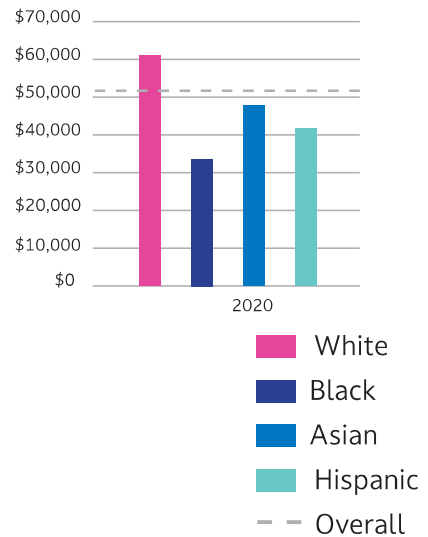


### Major Employment Sectors



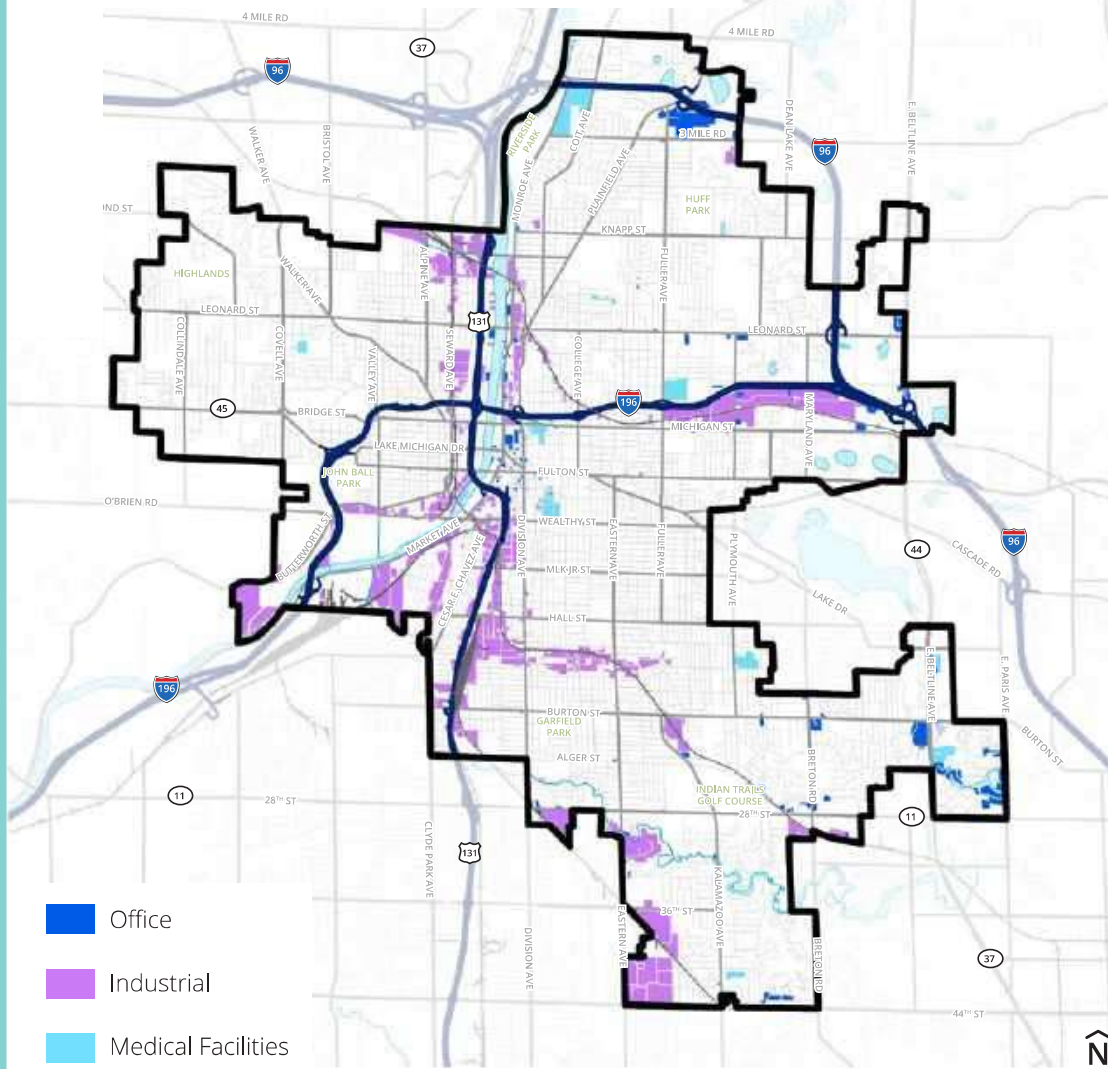
- **BIPOC workers are under-represented in sectors that provide higher-wage, entry-level positions with opportunities for advancement.** Successful economic development, that both attracts new talent and supports development of the workforce that is already in Grand Rapids, will need to build on the strategic direction for growth set in the Equitable Economic Development and Mobility Plan.
- **Hourly wages have not kept pace with the cost of living.** Currently, 49% of households in Grand Rapids are below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold, which includes households that have incomes above the federal poverty level but struggle to afford basic necessities (healthcare, food, housing, childcare, etc.). This is due in part to the gap between the living wage and the average wage. There is a need to grow industries that provide living wage jobs in alignment with the education and skills of the community while working to increase the education and skills of the community.
- **Traditional industrial land is limited.** Grand Rapids has approximately 6% of its total land zoned for industrial uses. Industrial areas tend to contain a lot of jobs, and include sites that house manufacturing or other production, along with warehouses and logistics functions. Many traditional large-scale uses like this operate best near highways and rail lines, and where utilities are available or easily built. However, not all industrial uses have the same impact on the surrounding areas as heavy manufacturing or large distribution centers. Some businesses, like bakers, small-batch brewers, or other makers with larger operations, may seek out similar physical spaces but could be located throughout the city.

Median Income by Race/Ethnicity





## EXISTING EMPLOYMENT LAND USES



## INDUSTRIAL LAND

Industrial is integrated along key corridors and covers 6% (1,750 acres) of Grand Rapids, primarily located along the river and major roadways. The areas on this map are determined based on the use designation maintained by the City of Grand Rapids Assessor's Office. These areas can offer unique opportunities for future redevelopment, but with limited land available, relocating industry within the city would require careful consideration. Once industrial land has been converted to other uses, it is nearly impossible to get back.

## OBJECTIVES

### 3.A INCREASE THE DENSITY OF HIGH-WAGE JOBS AND DECREASE THE WAGE GAP IN GRAND RAPIDS.

A healthy economy supports the creation of living wage jobs for a growing and increasingly diverse population. Currently, hourly wages are not keeping pace with the cost of living. Therefore, citywide prosperity will depend on smart approaches to economic growth, neighborhood development, and small business development. Land use strategies must address the increasing overlap between commercial, industrial, and professional or creative services sectors to provide broader employment opportunities citywide.

### 3.B ENSURE A WIDE RANGE OF RESIDENTS CAN ACCESS JOBS.

Grand Rapids has a significant number of jobs and employment centers that can only be accessed by car. Strategies to support mixed-use, walkable development at select transportation nodes and corridor intersections across Grand Rapids can support access to jobs for a wider range of residents. Additionally, coordinating land use with transportation system investments can help provide convenient access to existing jobs that are not currently or conveniently serviced by transit.

There is also the reality of the growing hybrid/remote work economy. It is becoming increasingly critical to ensure that the city has the infrastructure necessary for people to participate in this sector of the economy. Equitable distribution of high-speed internet and its supporting infrastructure needs to evolve over time for Grand Rapids to stay competitive. This would allow existing residents to fully participate in the global economy no matter where they live and make Grand Rapids even more attractive to remote workers.

### 3.C BALANCE ECONOMIC GROWTH WITH PRIORITIES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.

A healthy environment is vital to protect a quality of life that attracts and retains businesses and the employees. New strategies are needed to expand capacity for employment growth while also meeting environmental objectives. Truck intensity and access, proximity to housing and workforce, and environmental considerations must be considered in choices about the location of employment uses. Industrial sites should not pose health and safety risks to occupants or surrounding neighborhoods, and efforts to maintain and improve the capacity, affordability, and viability of industrial uses need to ensure that environmental resources and public health are also protected.

## VALUE THREADS

CULTURE



EQUITY



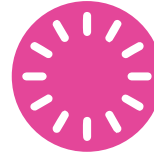
SAFETY



SUSTAINABILITY



VIBRANCY



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 3.A INCREASE THE DENSITY OF HIGH-WAGE JOBS AND DECREASE THE WAGE GAP IN GRAND RAPIDS.

**3.A.1 Support efforts to grow the greater Grand Rapids region into a major tech hub of the Midwest.** Capitalize on the momentum of the expanding technology sector and align workforce training with the needs of the labor market to attract new workers. Collaborate with The Right Place and other regional entities on the Greater Grand Rapids Tech Strategy, which aims to create 20,000 new tech jobs over the next 10 years. Specifically, facilitate the development of redevelopment-ready sites for new renewable energy industries to locate or relocate to Grand Rapids. Additionally, work to eliminate both physical and digital barriers, making Grand Rapids an appealing destination for high-tech jobs and attracting a diverse talent pool to the region.



**3.A.2 Encourage the growth of the life sciences industries in and near the Medical Mile.** The growth of life science and medical research in Grand Rapids and western Michigan overall is reaching a level of critical mass where more commercial lab development may become feasible. Evidence from several key life science clusters suggests that proximity is an important location determinant as it facilitates staff movement between clinical, academic, and research roles. Supporting this growth can take the following forms:



- Ensure life science research and development is a by-right use in zoning districts near the Medical Mile.
- Set minimum lot sizes to better accommodate life science uses that require large building footprints.

**3.A.3 Prioritize transformational projects that will enhance the regional and national appeal of Grand Rapids.** Actively support the development of the aquarium, amphitheater, and soccer stadium—among other key initiatives identified as transformational by The Right Place—to create vibrant spaces that attract visitors and foster community pride. These projects will help to position the community as a premier destination for residents and visitors.

### 3.B ENSURE A WIDER RANGE OF RESIDENTS CAN ACCESS JOBS.

**3.B.1 Identify key commercial corridors and neighborhood centers for reinvestment and future planning work.** Analysis in the Community Profile determined that there are significant income density differences across the city. These differences have implications for the ability of certain areas to support robust commercial corridors that offer a variety of jobs. Efforts may include prioritizing implementation of Area Specific Plans in Neighborhoods of Focus, areas experiencing significant growth and change, or those with limited outside investment. Auto-dominated corridors with potential for more density, such as 28th Street SE and Plainfield Avenue NE, should also be considered a priority. Area Specific Plans should lead to focused efforts and dedicated resources to improve infrastructure and building conditions on a district scale, potentially leveraging the resources of the Corridor Improvement Authorities.



**3.B.2 Evaluate reuse of obsolete industrial properties for other purposes.** Industrial buildings and land are a limited resource in Grand Rapids, and the suitability to reuse these large sites for research and development, medical uses, and other uses may put pressure on their overall availability. Reuse should undergo a high level of scrutiny relative to property size, building age, supporting infrastructure investment, truck intensity and rail access, proximity to housing and workforce, and environmental considerations to ensure land remains available for employment uses. Ensure the criteria aligns with the intended future character of these areas by including parcel size, utility infrastructure, major thoroughfare access, potential to buffer from conflicting uses, and proximity to transit, among other factors, in the evaluation and approval of non-industrial uses in industrial zones. Reuse of existing industrial buildings should not pose health and safety risks to occupants or surrounding neighborhoods. Industrial property along the riverfront may be best suited for other uses (e.g., housing and mixed-use).

- Clearly define industrial use to accurately represent the character of these places.
- Identify the differences between industrial manufacturing and warehousing or logistics uses and their implications for truck traffic when considering use changes.
- Consider the implications of the insertion of new uses into industrial areas and the inadvertent potential to constrain industrial uses in the future due to noise, smoke, truck traffic, and other impacts.



## THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF LIFE SCIENCE DEVELOPMENT

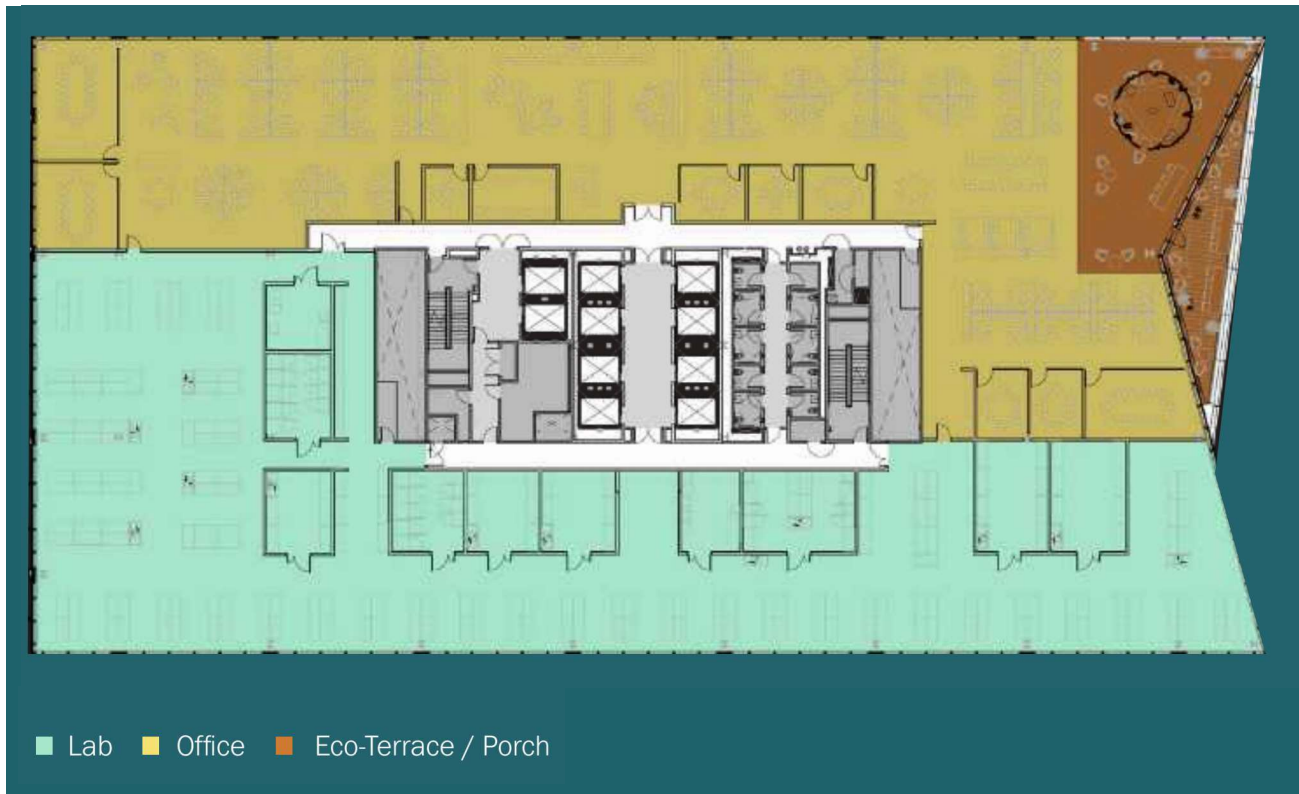
Life science is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the economy. The life science industry can be a key driver in Grand Rapids' vibrant economy and employment opportunities. Although there are variations in the definition, the "life sciences" generally refers to organizations and firms dedicated to improving human, animal, and plant life. It includes private, non-profit, and public institutions specializing in a wide set of interdisciplinary fields, including biotechnology, medical devices, and other related disciplines. It is distinct, although closely tied, to the healthcare industry, where medical care is directly provided in clinical settings.

Many life science developments have arisen in proximity to academic medical centers and other academic research programs due to the growing collaboration between corporations and academia. The proximity to academic medical centers and other academic research also provides a pipeline of talent for companies and institutions that are focused on recruitment of young professionals.

There are design challenges unique to life science buildings, such as large floor plans, higher floor-to-floor ceiling heights, and mechanical and operational needs. Science buildings also require a much greater level of service than office buildings with frequent large vehicle deliveries. Co-locating these services decreases the impact on nearby infrastructure and creates efficiencies for institutions.

**Example:** The 1.48 million-square-foot buildings in the Schuylkill Yards Development in Philadelphia are being developed adjacent to Drexel University, University of Pennsylvania, and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, within walking distance to the city center and the city's landmark cultural institutions. This proximity to academic research and clinical care promises to attract gene therapy startups and other life science stalwarts. Key to the development and design was applying the appropriate base building criteria for these unknown tenants and creating flexibility for right-sized lab suites for different users.

## EXAMPLE: SCHYUKILL YARDS



Life Science Building floor plan showing flexible layout. Unique building elements are noted below.

- 33' WIDE COLUMN  
BAY SPACING  

- 60/40 LAB TO OFFICE  
RATIO DAY ONE  

- 15 FOOT FLOOR-TO-  
CEILING HEIGHTS  

- EXTRA FLOOR  
LOADING CAPACITY  

- LARGE, FLEXIBLE 39K  
RSF FLOORPLATES  

- EMERGENCY POWER  
GENERATION



Area map showing proximity to nearby institutions.

**3.B.3 Reposition underutilized commercial retail properties to support non-retail businesses.** Expand the allowable uses in areas with commercial and retail sites that might be better suited to a wider range of employment land options, including research and development and light manufacturing that doesn't impact nearby residential uses. Many of these sites are currently located in Innovation centers and Community Activity Centers (e.g., 28th Street SE).

**3.B.4 Consider a hybrid business use category within Innovation Centers identified on the Future Character and Land Use Map.** Hybrid business models are commonly found in the craft brewery industry in Grand Rapids, where production, retail, and food service are co-located on a single site. Similar examples exist for a range of consumer product businesses, particularly entrepreneurial businesses, where a single integrated business model may exist but does not fit within existing use categories. Clear and simple regulation of these uses can encourage innovative entrepreneurial activity. Create, restructure, or refine use categories within the zoning ordinance to focus on impact to ensure industrial areas are preserved for business that makes things and employs people.

**3.B.5 Evaluate and enhance broadband access across the city.** Continue to support the provision of high-speed, reliable, and affordable fiber internet service to residents and businesses. Promote the advantages of “dig once” opportunities to coordinate the installation of underground fiber and/or conduit whenever the ground is open for other construction projects. Facilitate installations and enhance the system within public parks. Work with the local broadband service providers to assess service area gaps.

## C. BALANCE ECONOMIC GROWTH WITH PRIORITIES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.

**3.C.1 Grow more jobs within the city that are near the workforce.** Coordinate with other City departments to maintain data on job production, sectors, and locations. Utilize this information in review of large-scale projects. Encourage the creation of jobs in the city that are accessible to individuals with various skill sets, taking into account factors such as education and training, neighborhood transit options, and different career stages.

## INNOVATION DISTRICT

Over the past several decades, urban economies have evolved at a rapid pace. Manufacturers have shifted their operations, and the model of economic development that relies on recruiting one big company or single industry has often proven to be inequitable and unsustainable. Cities are now seeing a new generation of small, local makers and manufacturers develop sustainable ways to make a middle-class living. These producers are the bakers, small-batch brewers, woodworkers, and artists that make cities unique, support the creation of new sustainable jobs, and increase the city's tax revenue. These hybrid/small-scale businesses help create thriving places, with local business ownership opportunities and well-paying jobs that other business types can't fulfill, to create more inclusive economic opportunities.

"Artisan zoning" is an approach to land use and development that provides space for small-scale manufacturers that produce little to no vibration, noise, fumes, or other nuisances, meaning they can fit within a wide variety of industrial, commercial, and even residential districts. Recommendations within this chapter would open up land not currently zoned for industrial to semi-industrial uses. This versatility allows a range of commercial, industrial, and office activities within one building and could allow for a growing business to centralize their operations. Examples include design and print facilities, wholesale supply businesses, restaurants and sidewalk cafés, microbreweries or wineries, or veterinary clinics. This flexibility may lead to more vacant buildings being occupied and more tax revenues to support city services.

**Example:** Indianapolis began overhauling its zoning ordinance in 2012, with special emphasis on increasing high-paying jobs, using the surplus of vacant properties, and decreasing the mileage traveled by residents. The Division of Planning created two new designations, Artisan Manufacturing and Artisan Food and Beverage, which allowed small manufacturers to start working in non-industrial areas. It also included a blight-fighting provision that allows artisan manufacturers to work in buildings in certain land use categories that have been vacant for five years, making artisan manufacturing the most easily permitted form of manufacturing throughout the city. Reactivating these spaces has increased the property value and, in turn, the tax revenue for the city, and they now provide affordable spaces for start-up companies with a uniqueness that reflects the city's history.



## THE POTENTIAL FOR REUSE

Grand Rapids has opportunities to convert some of its excess commercial land, such as sections of 28th Street SE, to flexible mixed-use industrial areas. While some of this land may be best suited for higher-density commercial or housing, it will be important to keep some of these employment areas in job-focused uses. Factors such as the use of vans versus trucks, frequency of deliveries, and the ability to use buildings, should all be considered in the incremental development of these areas.

**Example:** In Raleigh, North Carolina, a shopping center with a former Kroger grocery store was renovated and became the Midtown BioCenter, featuring 80,000 square feet of lab and manufacturing space and 20,000 square feet of office space. Midtown BioCenter created space for a lab or biomanufacturing user to locate and operate alongside retail, office, and residential, within one mile of a major interstate, and at a lower price than similar developments located in the region's suburbs. This use would have otherwise looked for space within a more industrial area, but with its low-impact operations, gave a new purpose to an empty big box store in an underutilized commercial area.

Recommendation 3.B.3



Photo: CBRE

- 3.C.2 Promote the green economy.** The City should consider ways to promote the green economy, including support for local innovators and low-impact industries that incorporate a special recognition program (e.g., the Green Spot Program in the City of Columbus, Ohio, recognizes local businesses and households that fulfill certain commitments that support the local green economy).
- 3.C.3 Amend the zoning ordinance to reduce the impact of industrial uses on surrounding areas.** The City should consider code amendments that differentiate between light industrial and heavy industrial zoning districts. Implementing two industrial districts and directing heavy industrial uses to specific zones could reduce the impact on nearby residential areas and help to address long-term and historic environmental impacts while responding to the needs of a changing economy. Continue to require site improvements that buffer these uses from residential areas, including tree planting, planted screening, and landscape setbacks. Review and update relevant City ordinances that address noise impacts. Consider requiring all developments containing heavy industrial uses to be reviewed by the Planning Commission.
- 3.C.4 Continue brownfield remediation and redevelopment efforts.** Brownfield sites include properties with environmental contamination or functionally obsolete buildings. They may require mitigation or environmental clean-up and should be reintroduced into the economic cycle to maximize development opportunities that benefit the surrounding community. City programs and policies should continue to provide such support, with an emphasis on projects in Neighborhoods of Focus.

## 4. BALANCED MOBILITY



The continued growth of Grand Rapids and the larger metropolitan region has increased travel demand and the level of interaction between people walking, bicycling, taking transit, driving, and delivering goods. The City's ability to accommodate demands on the street is challenged by the physical constraints of the existing infrastructure and public rights of way. Therefore, existing streets and sidewalks must be used in the most efficient and effective manner possible. Grand Rapidsians deserve a transportation network that supports a diversity of modes and is safe, reliable, efficient, and affordable.

The recommendations in this chapter support the City's vision while advancing and building upon recent planning in the Vital Streets Plan, Bicycle Action Plan, Equitable Economic Development & Mobility Strategic Plan, The Rapid's Transit Master Plan, and Grand Valley Metro Council's Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Plan to promote consistency and ensure coordination between transportation initiatives and land use policies. These actions complement the overall goal to deliver a complete and viable mobility network that sustains Grand Rapids.

# BALANCED MOBILITY

## GOAL

**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.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

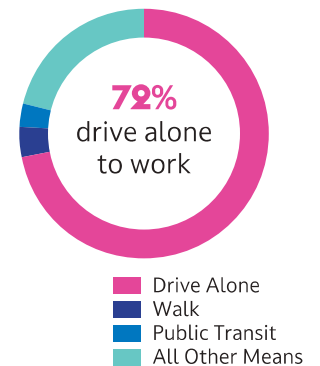
### PUBLIC INPUT

- **Grand Rapids has the potential to improve upon existing bicycle facilities.** Feedback on elements of a potential mobility toolkit emphasized the need for enhanced bicycle connectivity, particularly on major roads. Participants stressed that painted lines are insufficient and advocated for physical protection to improve bicyclists' safety. Many people expressed the desire to use bicycles for daily trips but feel deterred by current conditions.
- **Street design should prioritize safety.** Residents strongly support street design measures that reduce crossing lengths, increase visibility for and of pedestrians, and lead to an overall improvement in pedestrian safety.

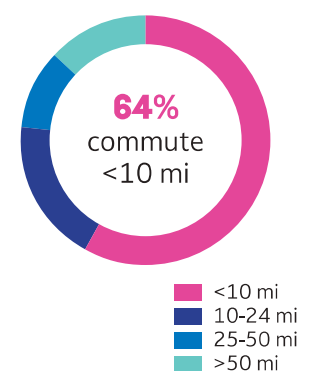
### COMMUNITY PROFILE

- **Most of the Grand Rapids workforce commutes by car.** According to the American Community Survey (2022), 5% of Grand Rapids residents walk or bicycle to work, 3% take public transit, and 9% carpool. Regardless of mode of travel, most residents (84%) have a commute lasting less than 30 minutes. This trend has increased over the last 15 years, with the number of people commuting more than 50 miles decreasing over that period. This may indicate that more people are living closer to where they work or that they have the flexibility to work remotely.
- **Transportation costs are high.** On average, 20% of a household's annual income in Grand Rapids is spent on transportation costs, higher than the national average of 16% (Center for Neighborhood Technology H+T Affordability Index). Transportation costs include the cost to own, maintain, and use a personal vehicle, and the cost of using transit. People who live in location-efficient neighborhoods—compact, mixed-use, and with convenient access to jobs, services, transit, and amenities—tend to have lower transportation costs.

Share of Commute Modes



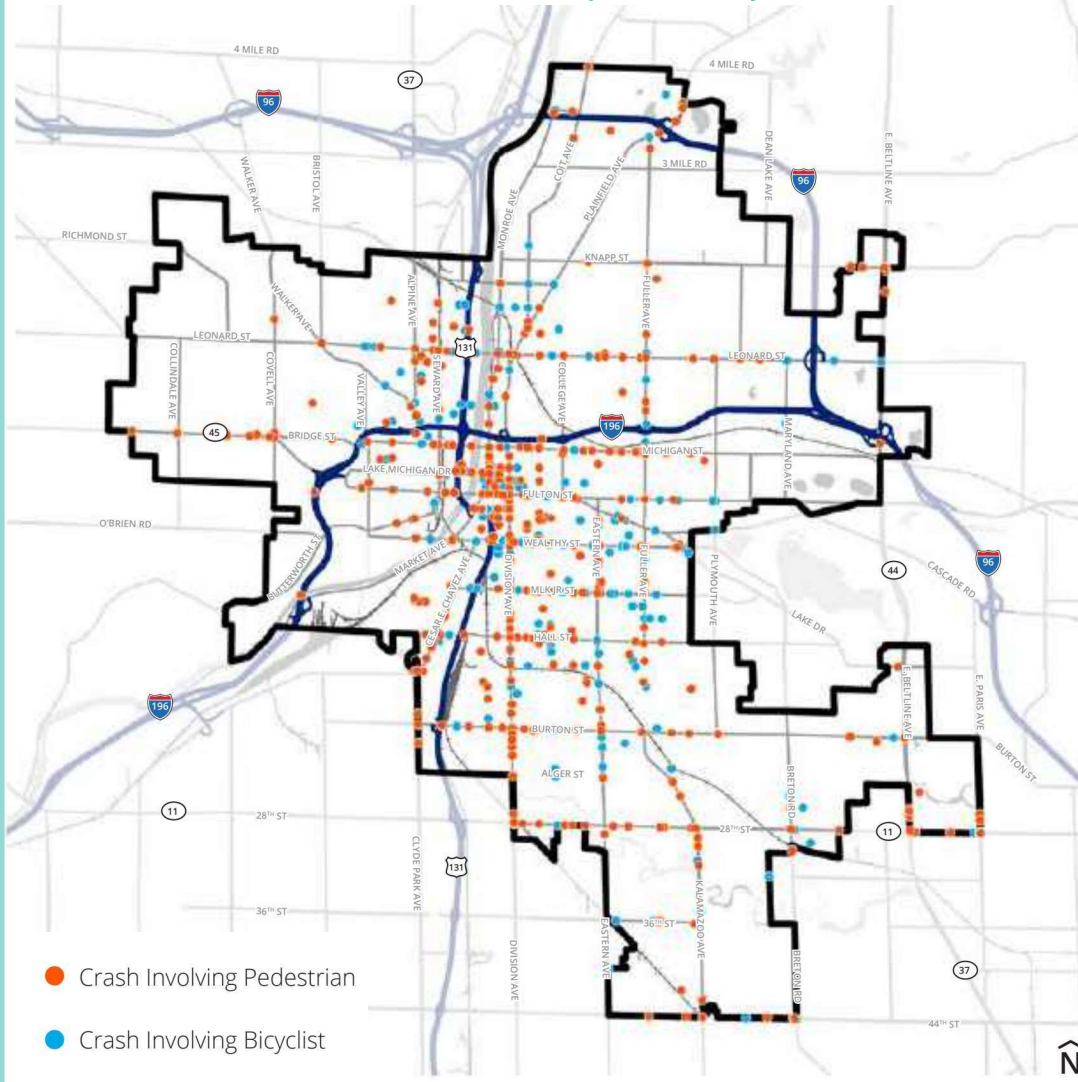
Average Commute Distance to Work





- Almost half of the incidents resulting in serious injuries or deaths concentrated in just 10% of the city.** From 2018 to 2022, 58 people were killed and 563 were seriously injured in traffic crashes in Grand Rapids, according to Michigan State Police (2022). Most of these crashes happen at intersections or along major corridors, with significant concentrations in and around downtown.

### BICYCLIST AND PEDESTRIAN CRASHES (2018-2022)



### USING CRASH DATA

Crash data is used to identify locations with safety issues and assist in the prioritization of safety projects or programs competing for limited resources. Combining data with roadway and traffic volume information helps to identify locations and safety improvements with the greatest potential for reducing crashes.

## OBJECTIVES

### 4.A DESIGN AND MAINTAIN STREETS THAT ARE SAFE FOR ALL ROAD USERS.

Fatal or disastrous traffic crashes are preventable. By prioritizing street design, maintenance, and operations, along with policy, education, and enforcement, Grand Rapids can create and maintain a network of streets that is safe for all road users, starting with those walking and bicycling, followed by those taking public transit, and finally those driving vehicles. This approach emphasizes the importance of accommodating the needs of the most vulnerable road users first. Grand Rapids has the opportunity to leverage priorities at the federal and state levels, including the National Roadway Safety Strategy and the Michigan Department of Transportation's goal to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries. By adopting new policy and design tools that have proven effective in peer cities, Grand Rapids can accelerate its efforts to enhance roadway safety for everyone.

### 4.B SUPPORT VIABLE TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS THAT ARE AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE.

Supporting a variety of affordable and accessible transportation options is imperative to ensuring all residents have the means to get where they need to go regardless of income or physical ability. Transportation, including public transit, must adapt to changing demographics and the shifting ways in which people work, live, and move over time. These changes, and the funding required for all modes, will not come from one organization. Success will require collaboration between The Rapid, the City, Kent County, surrounding municipalities, non-profit and for-profit organizations, employers, and residents to champion new multimodal infrastructure and policies aimed at keeping transportation options affordable and accessible. Planning streets for a variety of users, not just cars, can strengthen mobility overall and create a robust transportation landscape for every Grand Rapids community.

### 4.C COORDINATE LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION DECISIONS.

Land use and transportation are intrinsically linked. The types of land uses and their intensities will impact the number of people traveling to and from each destination and their travel patterns. Where different land uses are located impacts the distance people must travel. Details that may seem entirely related to the site, such as where the front door is located, whether there is dedicated parking, and where that parking is located, can have a significant impact on how people travel to and from the site and therefore the surrounding transportation network. Conversely, elements of the transportation network such as street design and the availability of mobility services (e.g. transit, bicycle/scooter share, and car share), can complement land use decisions and site design to support a community's broader goals. Finally, encouraging transit-oriented development (TOD) practices and coordinating development with transportation decisions will foster and maintain a more sustainable future than the expansion of urban sprawl.

## DEFINED

### TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Transit-oriented development (TOD) creates compact, mixed-use communities near transit where people enjoy easy access to jobs and services.

## VALUE THREADS

CULTURE



EQUITY



SAFETY



SUSTAINABILITY



VIBRANCY



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.A DESIGN AND MAINTAIN STREETS THAT ARE SAFE FOR ALL ROAD USERS.

**4.A.1 Improve intersections and corridors with the most serious and fatal traffic crashes.** Creating a safe transportation system for all road users requires prioritizing safety in resource allocation. Grand Rapids should take systematic, coordinated action in identifying and responding to safety issues while proactively designing spaces to mitigate safety risks using the Vital Streets Plan.

- Institutionalize a crash review committee to assess safety hazards and dangerous driving behaviors by reviewing serious injury and fatal crashes and trends. This responsibility could be assigned to existing City bodies, such as representatives from Engineering and Mobile GR.
- Establish best practices for applying countermeasures based on location conditions. Continue to coordinate safety improvements with other planned projects, particularly at locations with known safety issues.
- Integrate safety improvements into planned development review.
- Proactively identify safety enhancements near schools, older adult living facilities, and transit stops. Seek grant funding, such as Safe Routes to Schools, to support safety improvements.

**4.A.2 Address high-crash intersections and corridors through quick-build interventions.** Quick-build installations, where practical, work to address safety concerns using paint, signs, or other low-cost materials that are easier and faster to install or remove than more permanent materials, using City staff and materials. The quick-build installations, as determined by City staff, should be upgraded to permanent features over time through development and routine roadway projects.

## SAFETY TOOLKIT

The tools included below are mostly engineering or physical interventions to make streets safer for all users, with a particular emphasis on people walking and biking.

### WALKING

Curb extensions, or bump-outs, extend the sidewalk and align with the parking lane. Curb extensions reduce crossing distances, slow turning vehicles, and improve pedestrian visibility. In the long-term, curb extensions can be installed using paint, bollards, and/or planters.



### BUS RIDING

A bus bulb is a curb extension that extends the sidewalk to align the bus stop with parking lane. This allows buses to serve transit stops without leaving the travel lane and is helpful in areas where buses have difficulty merging into traffic, or where passengers require a dedicated waiting area.



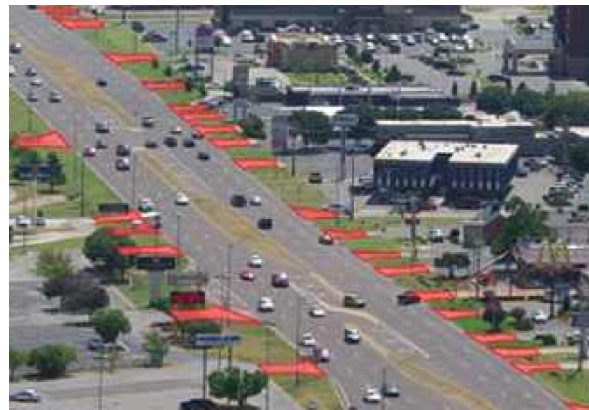
### BICYCLING

Quick-build protected intersections separate people biking from motor vehicle traffic by setting the bicycling facility back from turning cars and using corner islands to encourage slower turns. They improve visibility of people biking and create clearer expectations for all users' behavior using signs, paint, pavement markings, flexible bollards, or planters.



### WALKING

Driveway access interrupts sidewalk continuity and introduces conflict points for pedestrians and vehicles. An access management policy as a policy controls the location, spacing, and design of driveways. Good access management can limit driveways, particularly redundant ones, to maintain safety.





#### 4.A.3 **Provide citywide education and engagement about mobility projects and issues.** Community education and engagement are important ways to improve safety and build transparency, accountability, and trust.

- Partner with community organizations to provide education and engagement to residents about dangerous driving behaviors, as well as mobility projects, infrastructure, and policy initiatives.
- Work with the Office of Equity and Engagement to institutionalize and expand upon best practices for equitable engagement within transportation projects.

### 4.B **SUPPORT VIABLE TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS THAT ARE AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE, AND MEET COMMUNITY MEMBERS' NEEDS.**

#### 4.B.1 **Make strategic investments in bicycle facilities.** Progress toward implementing the Bicycle Action Plan vision for a comprehensive bicycle network throughout the City of Grand Rapids is ongoing. Bicycle facilities should be designed for people of all ages and abilities to comfortably ride, which may necessitate physically protected bicycle facilities on streets with higher speeds and more cars. Continue engagement for projects to ensure changes to the streetscape meet the needs of a variety of residents, employees, and business owners, among others.



#### 4.B.2 **Support shared mobility models to increase transportation choices.** With the emergence of new modes and services such as pooled ridesharing, car sharing, and bicycle/scooter sharing, there is significant opportunity to serve more neighborhoods and provide first- and last-mile connections. Continue to support shared mobility models to strengthen the overall connection between modes of transportation, explore partnerships that promote these services, and evaluate ongoing partnerships.



#### 4.B.3 **Promote electric bicycle and vehicle ownership.** Continue to fund and install publicly accessible vehicle chargers in the public right-of-way and in public parking lots and garages.



- Establish an incentive program for residents to purchase bicycles, including electric bicycles.
- Evaluate the distribution of publicly accessible charging opportunities and establish a target for charging stations by area, factoring in residential and employment densities, and demographics, to project demand.
- Ensure zoning requirements for privately owned off-street parking lots and decks require the installation of a minimum number of chargers based on the number of parking spaces. The minimum requirement may be tailored to address the demands of different land uses.

### DEFINED

#### FIRST- AND LAST-MILE CONNECTIONS

This term describes the beginning or end of an individual trip made primarily by public transportation. On either end of a public transit trip, the origin or destination may be difficult or impossible to access by a short walk. The trip from a destination to public transit is called the first mile connection, and the trip from public transit to a destination is termed a last mile connection.



#### 4.B.4 Support programs that encourage travel options other than personal vehicles.



Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs are a set of policies, strategies, and initiatives designed to optimize the use of transportation infrastructure and services, reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and enhance overall transportation efficiency. Continue to participate in Grand Valley Metropolitan Council's (GVMC) regional TDM working group and work to implement the actions of the GVMC Regional TDM Plan. Program elements could include strategies that:

- Manage demand through pricing tools, such as demand-based parking pricing, parking cash-out programs, and employer subsidies for commutes via transit, walking, and biking.
- Encourage the use of more efficient modes of transportation through site design and development, including indoor and outdoor bicycle parking requirements, and siting guidelines that emphasize multi-modal access.
- Develop programs to support employees who carpool, walk, bicycle, or use transit to access jobs, such as providing adequate facilities like bicycle storage, showers, and changing rooms, implementing carpool rewards programs, and fostering a culture of sustainability.
- Provide resources on the City's website about elements of a TDM program, common strategies and tools, and best practices. Collaborate with GVMC to include resources and templates for establishing TDM programs.

#### 4.B.5 Support collaboration between businesses, organizations, and communities to expand commute options.



In areas of dense employment without robust public transportation, such as the employment node at 44th Street and Eastern Avenue, work with employers to create Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) to identify and deploy transportation options that meet the specific needs of the employees' travel patterns. A TMA can provide transportation services targeted to a specific geography, for example, by coordinating a park-and-ride program or providing a shuttle service between a transit-oriented node and employment node. TMAs often operate as non-profit organizations sponsored by employer dues or service fees, but their creation can be supported by staff resources from their host municipalities.

#### 4.B.6 Continue to invest in transit stop amenities.




Strategically invest in transit stop amenities, such as shelters, real-time arrival information, lighting, and enhanced pedestrian crossings across The Rapid network, especially at facilities that do not meet ADA requirements and the Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG), experience high ridership, and serve as important route connections or key community destinations. The quality of transit stops is an important

factor of bus ridership and customer satisfaction, and impacts safety, particularly for more vulnerable populations. They should be comfortable places to wait, surrounded by safe and accessible walking conditions. Transit stops should also be coordinated with alternative modes of transportation as part of a mobility hub, wherever possible.

- 4.B.7 Work with Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to address highways and state routes where they create barriers to safe walking, bicycling and riding transit.**  Inventory highway over/underpasses, interchanges, and access roads that create barriers to easy and safe pedestrian and bicycle access, particularly to transit facilities. Address problematic barriers, such as sidewalks below overpasses, with improved infrastructure and streetscape elements such as sidewalks, trees, lighting, landscaping, artistic features, and wayfinding.

## 4.C COORDINATE LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION DECISIONS.

- 4.C.1 Reduce minimum parking requirements to support compact growth patterns.**  Allow vehicle parking reductions or eliminations as an incentive to encourage infill development, especially when located in Neighborhood Centers, on a transit route, or on streets that identify pedestrians as priority users in the Vital Streets Plan. Allow by-right reduction in parking in more situations and expand the opportunity to waive parking regulations to more development situations without a reliance on-street parking. Pair these changes with efforts to preserve and ensure housing affordability, enabling those who depend on and benefit from transit the most to benefit from these policies.
- 4.C.2 Limit the size of surface parking lots.**  Minimize the impact of surface parking lots downtown and in Neighborhood Centers and Community Activity Centers by setting maximum sizes on new and modified lots. This could be regulated by square footage of impervious area or the number of parking spaces. Consider restricting the creation of new surface parking to prioritize space for people.
- 4.C.3 Establish mobility hubs at neighborhood, employment, and transit-oriented nodes as shown in the Conceptual Development Framework.** Mobility hubs should bring together a variety of mobility options in close proximity to enable easy connections between modes. Hubs can include transit stops, bicycle/scooter share, car share, and electric charging stations. Pursue interdepartmental and stakeholder partnerships to identify ways to build on mobility hubs.

## PARKING REFORM

Most cities, towns, and counties establish in their zoning code a minimum number of off-street parking spaces for development, such as 0.5 parking spaces per bedroom. The purpose of parking requirements is to ensure that new residents and businesses have a dedicated place for their vehicles and avoid negative spillover effects on the surrounding area. However, this one-size-fits-all parking requirement often results in an excess supply of parking spaces that negatively impacts people walking, biking, and using other multi-modal devices, by prioritizing vehicle access and infrastructure over safe places for people.

Paved parking areas also contribute to the urban heat island effect and accumulate pollutants that run off into local waterways. The provision of excess parking may also lead to increased emissions and energy consumption by encouraging car trips over alternative modes.

Parking requirements themselves can make development projects more expensive, particularly when land prices are very high or where expensive underground or above ground parking structures are needed to fit the required number of spaces. By eliminating parking requirements, cities can allow the market to dictate the amount of parking needed, and help lower the cost that would be passed on to a future owner or tenant and free up space for additional units and/or amenities.

Across the country, cities are eliminating required parking for new buildings and new businesses in existing buildings. The reforms, along with policies that manage street parking, help to reduce car dependency, create public and green spaces, and lower housing costs.



Photo: Feed and Folly

Above: The zoning code required 35 parking spaces for a restaurant in this building in Fayetteville, Arkansas. With limited land to provide the required amount of parking, it sat vacant for 40 years. Then the parking requirement was eliminated, making it more feasible for a business to open in that space.

**4.C.4 Develop comprehensive curbside management guidelines that address loading zones, drop-off/pickup zones, on-street parking, and bicycle/scooter parking.** Demand for curbside space has shifted with the emergence of new modes of transportation and trends in how people travel, shop, and connect with services. The Equitable Economic Development & Mobility Strategic Plan acknowledged that curb space is in high demand and that goals-driven prioritization is necessary. Building on this recommendation, develop a comprehensive guide to curbside management in coordination with other City departments. The guidelines should:



- Provide direction to practitioners on which activities to prioritize (e.g., access, loading, mobility, storage, place making) based on street typologies (as established in the Vital Streets Plan).
- Designate the placement of loading zones, pick-up/drop-off zones, on-street parking, EV charging, bus bulbs, bicycle facilities, parklets, and bicycle/scooter parking.

**4.C.5 Consider modes of travel other than cars in the development review and approval process.** Work with developers to ensure that development projects and their site designs support community goals by incorporating multimodal considerations (e.g., door placement or parking location) into the project development review process, with particular attention to safe access. Adopt a definition of corridor capacity and evaluation that considers multimodal transportation, rather than simply vehicle throughput and delay. Incorporate this as an expectation in corridor studies.



**4.C.6 Ensure new developments maintain walkable and bikeable roadway networks with appropriate access to transit.** Grand Rapids' roadway network has a tight grid of streets that facilitates walking and bicycling by minimizing trip length and enabling direct connections. Future developments should maintain that framework and build convenient networks that connect to the existing street grid to ensure walkable and bicycleable neighborhoods. Consider adding language to the Zoning Ordinance to encourage shorter block lengths, in addition to the current maximums noted, and guidelines or targets for connectivity.



**4.C.7 Support implementation of the Vital Streets Plan.** As land use context changes over time, review and modify the street types and mode emphasis overlays in the Vital Streets Plan, with input from City staff. Continue to evaluate street typologies and recommend changes to the Vital Streets Plan as development progresses under the CMP. When the Vital Streets Plan is updated, ensure it is more inclusive of evolving transportation needs. Seek renewal of the Vital Streets income tax for continued and possibly expanded investment in the right of way.





# 5. DESIRABLE DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER





Managing the community's physical environment, both built and natural, is a critical aspect of the Community Master Plan. This chapter provides guidance for the physical development of Grand Rapids. The future land use component in this chapter serves as the foundation for the city's zoning regulations. This element also substantially influences the CMP's other topics, particularly transportation, housing, and economic prosperity.

The development principles in this chapter provide additional guidance for desired development outcomes. Building upon the intent described in the principles, the Conceptual Development Framework map depicts general locations where future development is encouraged. This diagram portrays a high level view of anticipated development concepts detailed in the Plan.

# DESIRABLE DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

## GOAL

Grand Rapids will have a strong sense of place through high quality design.

New development will improve or support the built fabric of each neighborhood.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

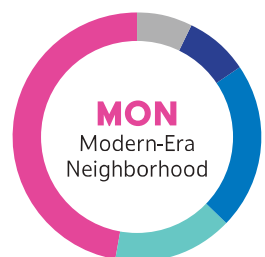
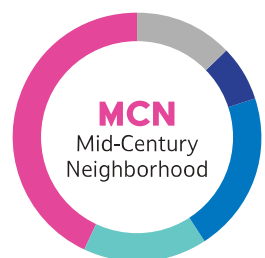
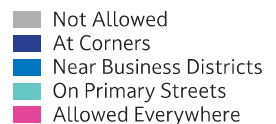
### PUBLIC INPUT

- **There is support for integrating more housing types.** Round three of public engagement specifically asked about comfort with housing types other than single-family homes in residential areas. The results showed significant support for accessory dwelling units in all neighborhood types and all locations. There was similar support for duplexes everywhere. Just under half of round three participants supported triplexes or quadplexes in all locations. However, people were largely comfortable with these housing types being located along primary streets and near business districts.
- **There is a desire to preserve and create places that strengthen quality of life.** When asked about design, many people pointed to bulk and height as being important to the development in their neighborhood. People generally wanted to see new buildings that fit with the scale of existing homes. Many comments highlighted quality materials as the most important thing to emphasize in the design of new buildings.

### COMMUNITY PROFILE

- **Neighborhoods are currently categorized into three unique types.** The Zoning Ordinance, which regulates land use and development standards, defines three types of neighborhoods, Traditional, Mid-Century, and Modern Era. Each neighborhood type allows for a variety of uses from mixed residential to office to commercial.
- **Industrial land is currently integrated along key corridors.** Industrial areas account for 6% of the land in Grand Rapids (1,750 acres), primarily located along the river and major roadways. Included in these industrial areas are a number of brownfield sites, or properties that are contaminated, blighted, or functionally obsolete. These sites may present unique environmental factors for redevelopment.

### Support for Triplexes and Quadplexes (Round 3)



## DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

Development principles describe the intent about “how” (general character) and “where” (conceptual location) growth and development in Grand Rapids should occur. They provide additional guidance for desired development outcomes and include the quality, appearance, pattern, and character of development. These principles are supported by the Future Character and Land Use Map, which depicts the locations where they apply.

### Our Grand Rapids community will...

1. Ensure the development process incorporates residents' needs to maintain a safe, equitable, and healthy neighborhood environment.
2. Preserve and enhance the uniqueness of each neighborhood's history including physical landmarks and lived experiences.
3. Serve as stewards of the environment through development decisions that integrate natural features and climate considerations.
4. Provide desirable housing options at a broad range of styles, price levels, and occupancy types that complement established neighborhoods.
5. Focus development that integrates mixed-uses (residential, commercial, civic, institutional, office, etc.) at key locations to serve adjacent neighborhoods.
6. Connect places such as neighborhoods, mixed-use districts, employment centers, and other Activity Centers with opportunities to walk, bike, drive, and access public transit.
7. Cultivate community-based placemaking through infill and redevelopment that complements the form, scale, design, and cultural histories of the surrounding area.
8. Foster a downtown district that features a vibrant mix of businesses, diverse housing options, and entertainment or recreation amenities with a unique character.
9. Feature access to the Grand River through strategic development opportunities and preservation efforts that build upon the vision of a restored river.
10. Maintain the City's financial health through efficient use of infrastructure, strengthening employment centers, and expanding development incentives.

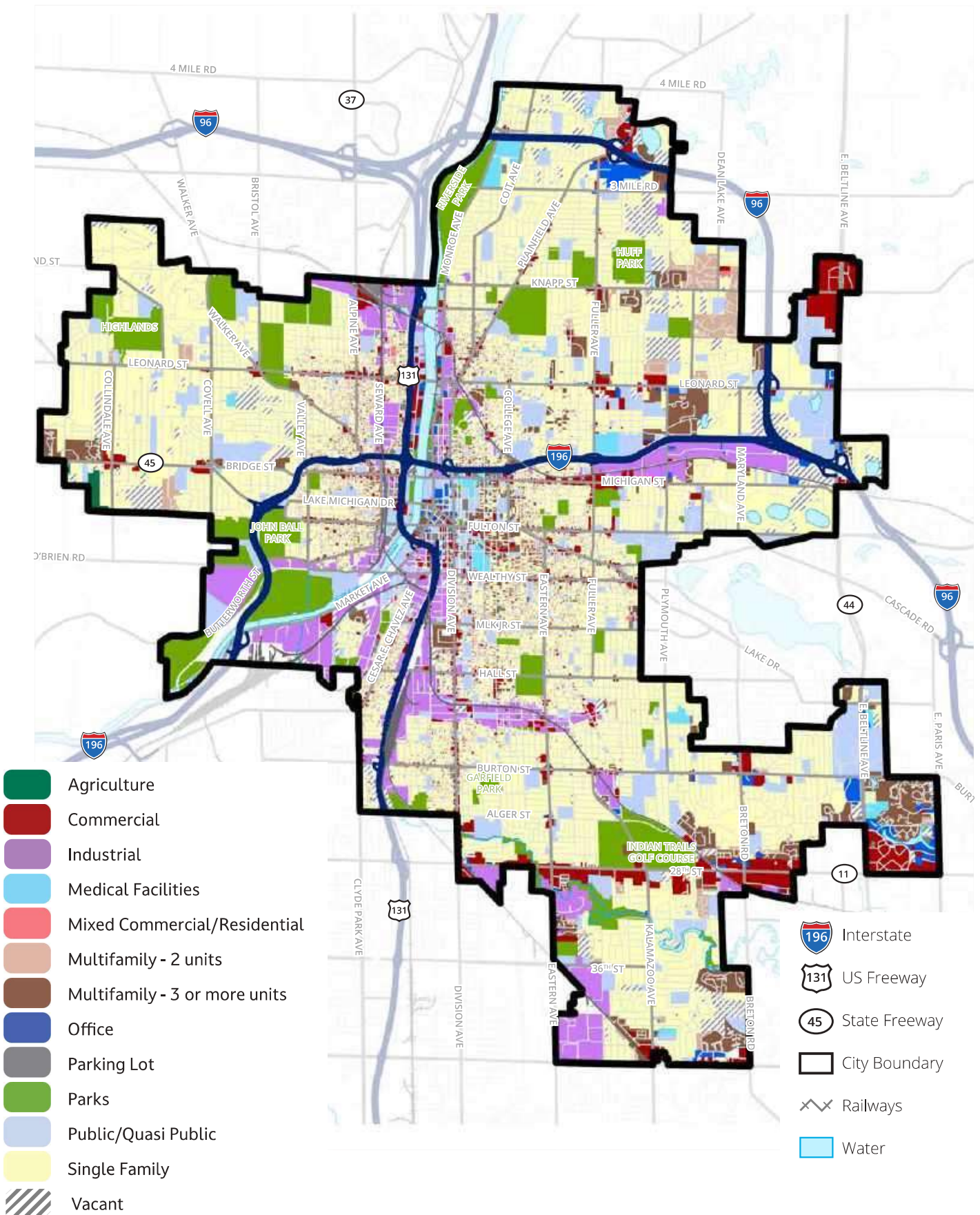
## EXISTING LAND USE MAP

Determining desired future land use changes in Grand Rapids required first developing an understanding of current land use and development patterns.

The existing land use descriptions are based on property assessment land use data and establish a baseline for how the City's land is allocated. The categories represent a snapshot of the community at the moment of plan creation. The planning team applied the following categories to properties City-wide to conduct the existing land use analysis:

- **Agriculture.** Land used for the cultivation of soil, growing crops, and raising animals for food and other products.
- **Commercial.** Land used for retail, restaurants, shopping centers, auto-oriented businesses, mixed-use developments, and other similar uses.
- **Industrial.** Land used for manufacturing, warehousing, research and development, logistics, and other similar uses.
- **Medical.** Land used for medical offices and facilities.
- **Mixed-Commercial/Residential.** Land with both commercial and residential uses on a single parcel.
- **Multifamily - 2 units.** Land used for residential areas with two or more dwelling units on a single parcel. This includes duplexes and single-family homes with accessory dwelling units.
- **Multifamily - 3 or more units.** Land used for residential areas with three or more dwelling units on a single parcel.
- **Single-family.** Land used for an individual detached, residential dwelling unit on a single parcel.
- **Office.** Land used for general office buildings.
- **Parking.** Land used for the off-street parking or storage of vehicles.
- **Parks and Open Spaces.** Land used for public parks, protected conservation areas, cemeteries, designated open spaces within neighborhoods, and private or semi-public recreational areas such as golf courses.
- **Public/Quasi Public.** Land used for public safety facilities, schools, places of worship, and other public land not used for parks.
- **Vacant.** Land that is currently undeveloped, without a predominant use or primary building.

## EXISTING LAND USE





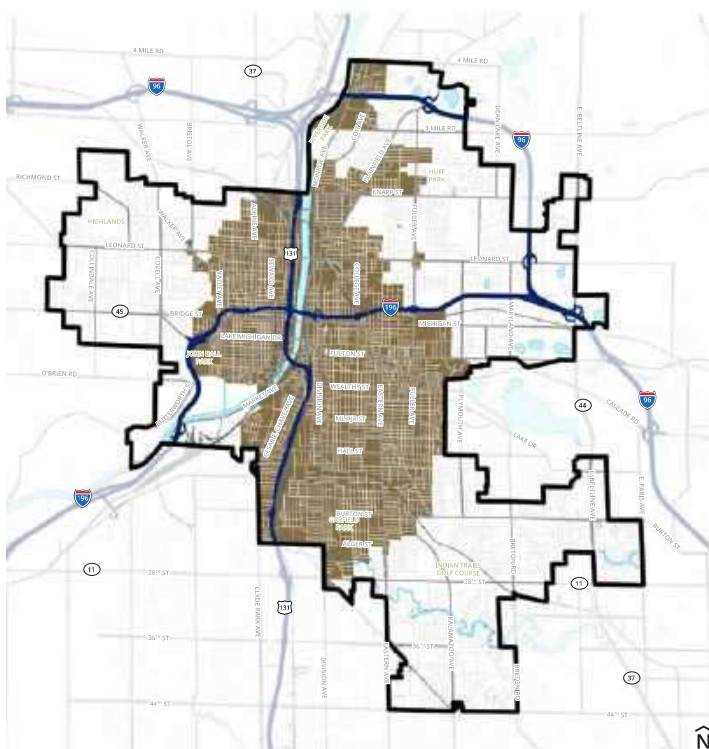
## NEIGHBORHOOD CLASSIFICATIONS

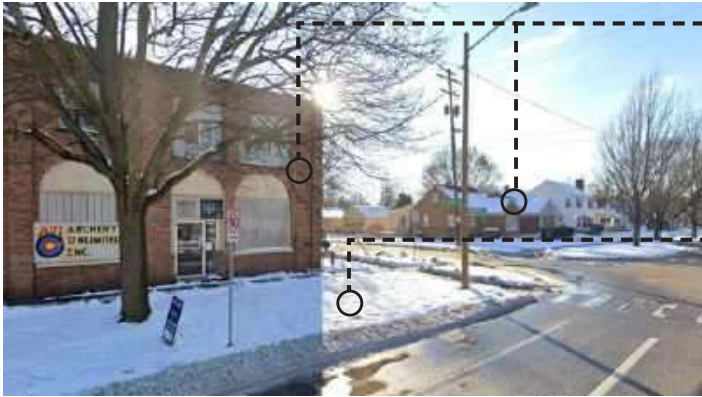
Grand Rapids can be characterized as having three distinct residential neighborhood geographies—Traditional Neighborhoods, Mid-20th Century Neighborhoods, and Modern Neighborhoods. Established in the 2002 Master Plan and reflected in the Zoning Ordinance, these classifications highlight the evolving nature of its communities. Each neighborhood type embodies distinct characteristics that reflect the city's growth and development over time.

### TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS

Developed prior to the automobile era, these neighborhoods with an interconnected street grid, were designed to provide residents with a variety of commercial and institutional uses within a short walk of their homes. Diversity in building size, setbacks, and use enhances the vitality of these neighborhoods. The characteristics of the built environment of a Traditional Neighborhood include:

- A pattern of small blocks, alleys, and a connected street grid system;
- Smaller building footprints on smaller sites with variable lot sizes (in contrast to the uniformity of newer subdivision housing development);
- Human-scaled buildings with high-quality exterior materials;
- Front building walls oriented parallel to the street;
- Well-defined building entries and windows constituting at least 50% of the street-facing wall;
- Pedestrian, bicycle, and transit orientation, with provision of on-street parking and off-street surface parking areas that are located behind commercial buildings; and
- Integrated residential and nonresidential land uses located in the same building or in proximity to one another without extensive buffering.





*Integrated residential and nonresidential land uses located in the same building or in proximity to one another without extensive buffering.*

*Smaller building footprints on smaller sites with variable lot sizes (in contrast to the uniformity of newer subdivision housing development).*

*Human-scale buildings, pedestrian, bicycle, and transit orientation, with provision of on-street parking and off-street surface parking areas that are located behind commercial buildings.*



*Well-defined building entries and windows.*

*Provision of on-street parking.*

*Pattern of small blocks and alleys.*

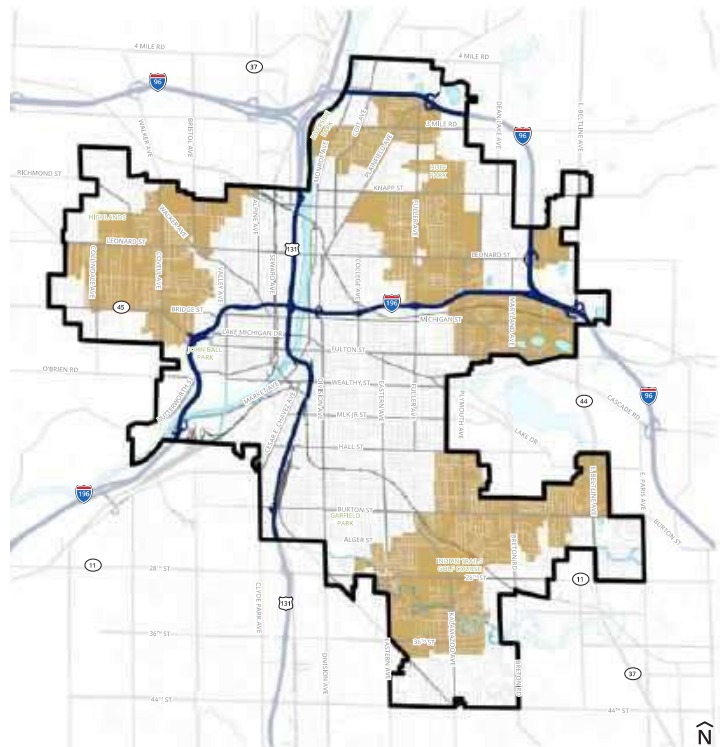
*Front building wall oriented parallel to street.*



## MID-20TH CENTURY NEIGHBORHOODS

Built between 1936 and 1979, these neighborhoods reflect a shift toward car-dependent living, with larger lots and homes set back from the street. The street grid is less interconnected, separating land uses and creating distinct boundaries between housing types. The characteristics of the built environment of a Mid-20th Century Neighborhood include:

- Curvilinear streets with sporadic culs-de-sac or alleys.
- Larger uniform lot sizes with generous building setbacks.
- Some mixed uses integrated within a neighborhood, but uses generally segregated.
- Pedestrian and automobile-oriented streetscapes that include sidewalks and limited parking in the front of buildings.
- Building entries predominately oriented to the street.
- Simplified building articulation and massing.







*Some mixed uses integrated within a neighborhood, but uses generally segregated.*

*Curvilinear streets with sporadic culs-de-sac or alleys.*



*Larger, uniform lot sizes with generous setbacks.*

*Pedestrian and automobile oriented streets with sidewalks and limited parking.*

*Simplified building articulation and massing.*

*Building entries oriented to street.*

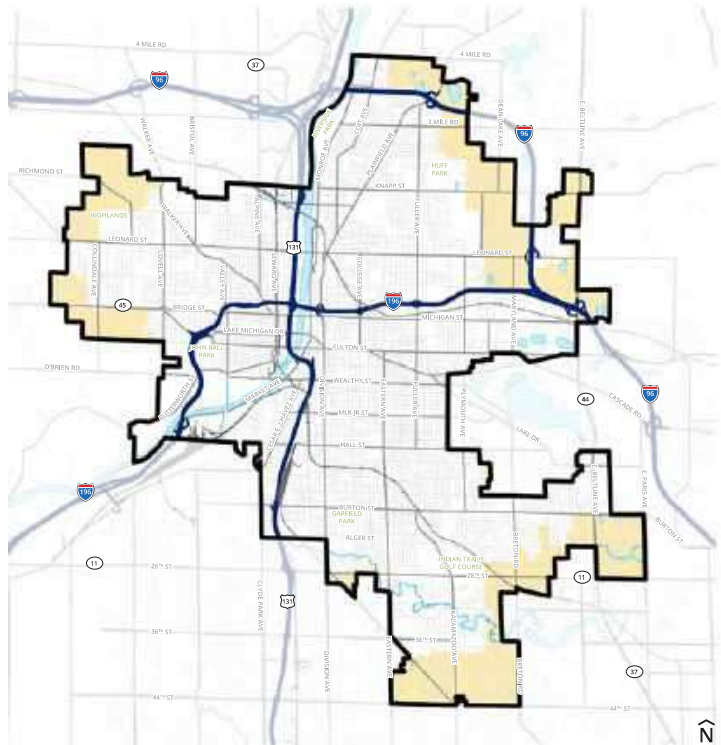


## MODERN ERA NEIGHBORHOODS

Developed after the 1980s, these neighborhoods feature separated uses, with residential and commercial areas connected by major roadways, often requiring driving between destinations. These residential areas have looser street patterns and limited connectivity. The presence of sidewalks is often intermittent.

The characteristics of the built environment of a Modern Era Neighborhood include:

- Larger lots and deeper setbacks in residential areas.
- Single-family homes, apartments, office complexes, and shopping centers that are segregated.
- Building entrances often oriented away from the street.
- Prominent garages, driveways, and automobile-oriented streetscapes.
- Multiple roof forms or complex massing.



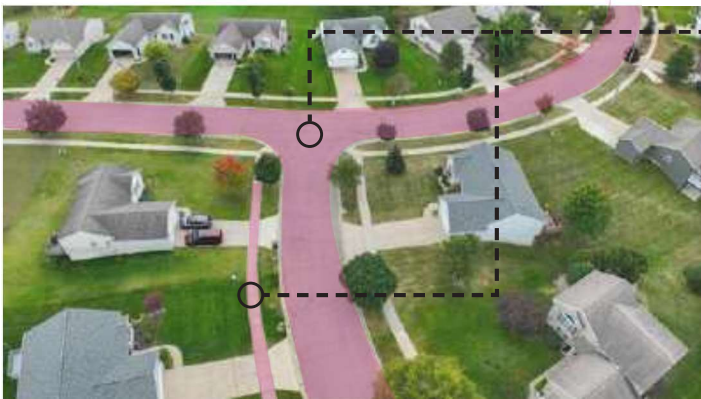




*Prominent garages, driveways, and automobile-oriented streetscapes.*

*Multiple roof forms or complex massing.*

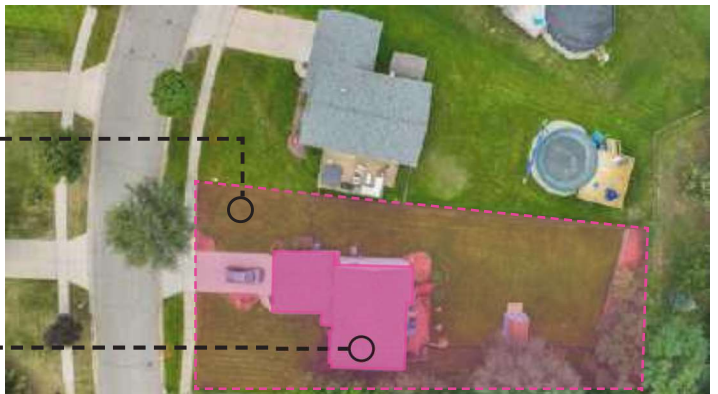
*Building entrances often oriented away or pulled back from the street.*



*Strong automobile orientation with less prominent sidewalks and no marked crosswalks.*

*Large lot sizes with deep setbacks.*

*Segregated single-family residential land use.*



## CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The Conceptual Development Framework is a complement to the Future Character and Land Use Map, and illustrates where investment should be prioritized to support existing and possible future nodes of activity, connected by significant corridors. Nodes are places where people and transportation routes congregate and converge. They are either currently (established), or have the potential to be (emerging), walkable and economically diverse and to provide safe and convenient access to shops, amenities, and services. The location and size of each node is diagrammatic, and illustrates its relative development intensity. The shaded circle represents a quarter-mile radius from the edge of the node.



**Neighborhood Nodes** are central to residential neighborhoods or areas of businesses. These mixed-use areas are primarily neighborhood-serving but may have a regional draw. They provide residents with access to businesses, services, and amenities within a short walk of their home. Neighborhood nodes are intended to include a mix of commercial, civic, institutional, and residential uses. Allowing for increased residential density within a short radius (quarter-mile) of neighborhood nodes is important for supporting existing and future development.



**Transit-Oriented Nodes** are located along major transit routes. These districts are intended to contain a diverse mix of businesses that could have a regional and/or local draw and are designed to provide a range of housing choices within a ten-minute walk. Transit-oriented development is a significant solution to climate change as it creates dense, walkable communities that significantly reduce the need for driving and energy consumption.



**Employment Nodes** host a mix of employment opportunities either within the node or in the surrounding areas. These nodes encourage growth within areas that support regionally significant concentrations of non-retail employment including institutional, office, and industrial centers. There may be opportunities for high- and medium-density residential, retail, and supporting services.



**Neighborhoods of Focus (NOFs)** are the census tracts in the near west and south side of Grand Rapids in relation to downtown. Due to systemic and historic inequities, residents in NOFs experience the most disparate outcomes in income, educational opportunities, home ownership, and wealth accumulation compared to other Grand Rapids census tracts and the city as a whole. The City of Grand Rapids strives to eliminate inequities by investing in these areas.



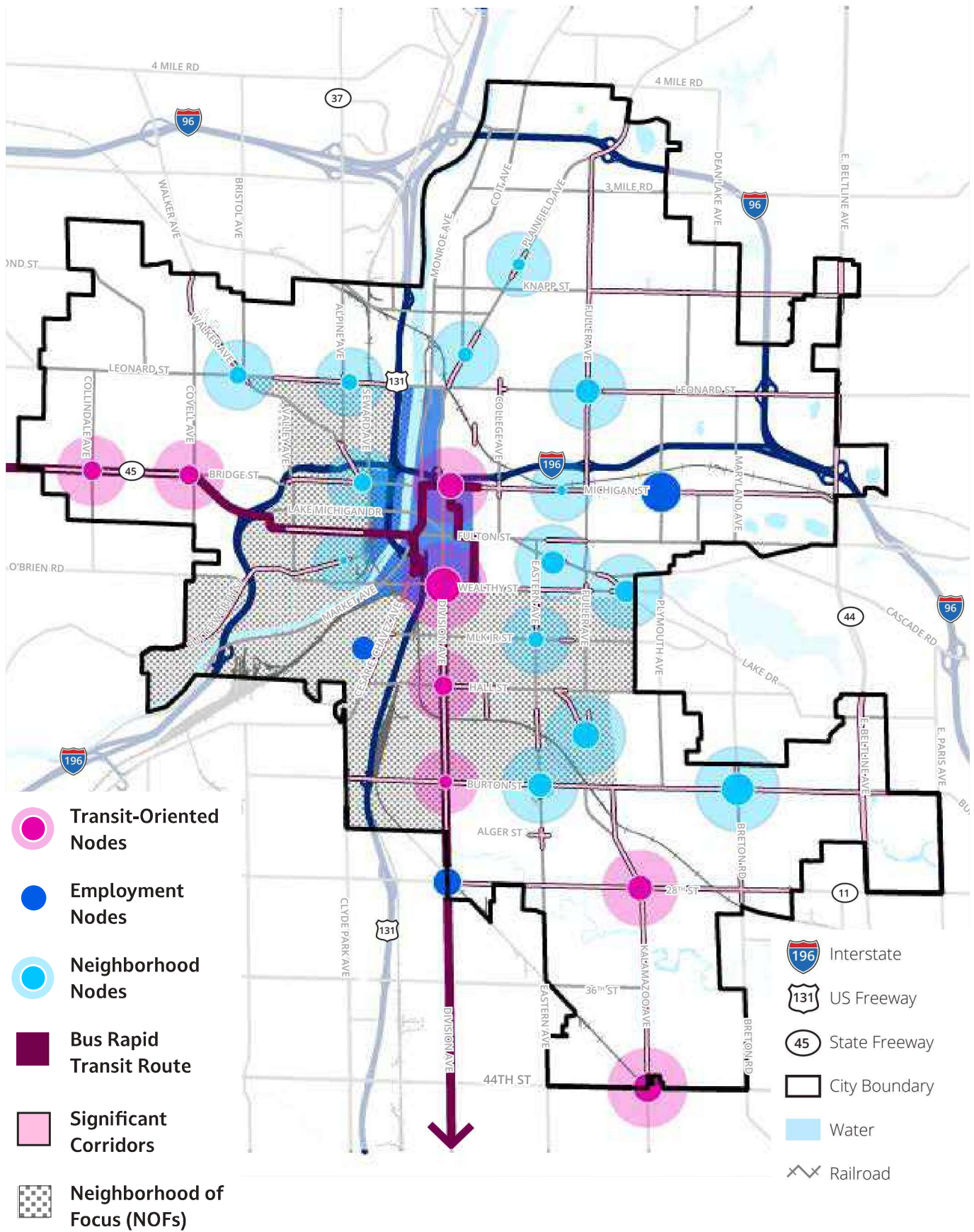
**Significant Corridors** are important transportation connectors along which safety and access for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-car modes should be prioritized. These corridors are designated Crosstown Connectors and Neighborhood Business in the Vital Street Plan (VSP). They connect residents to important places in the community and increased residential density is encouraged. Enhancements to support this density may include investments in sidewalks, crosswalks, bicycle facilities, traffic calming, street trees and lighting, in line with guidance in the VSP.

### METHODOLOGY

The Team reviewed the existing CMP and adopted ASPs to compile all identified nodes into a composite map. The map was refined in coordination with staff, taking into consideration median income, population density, future neighborhood centers, and transit routes.



## CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



## FUTURE CHARACTER AND LAND USE MAP

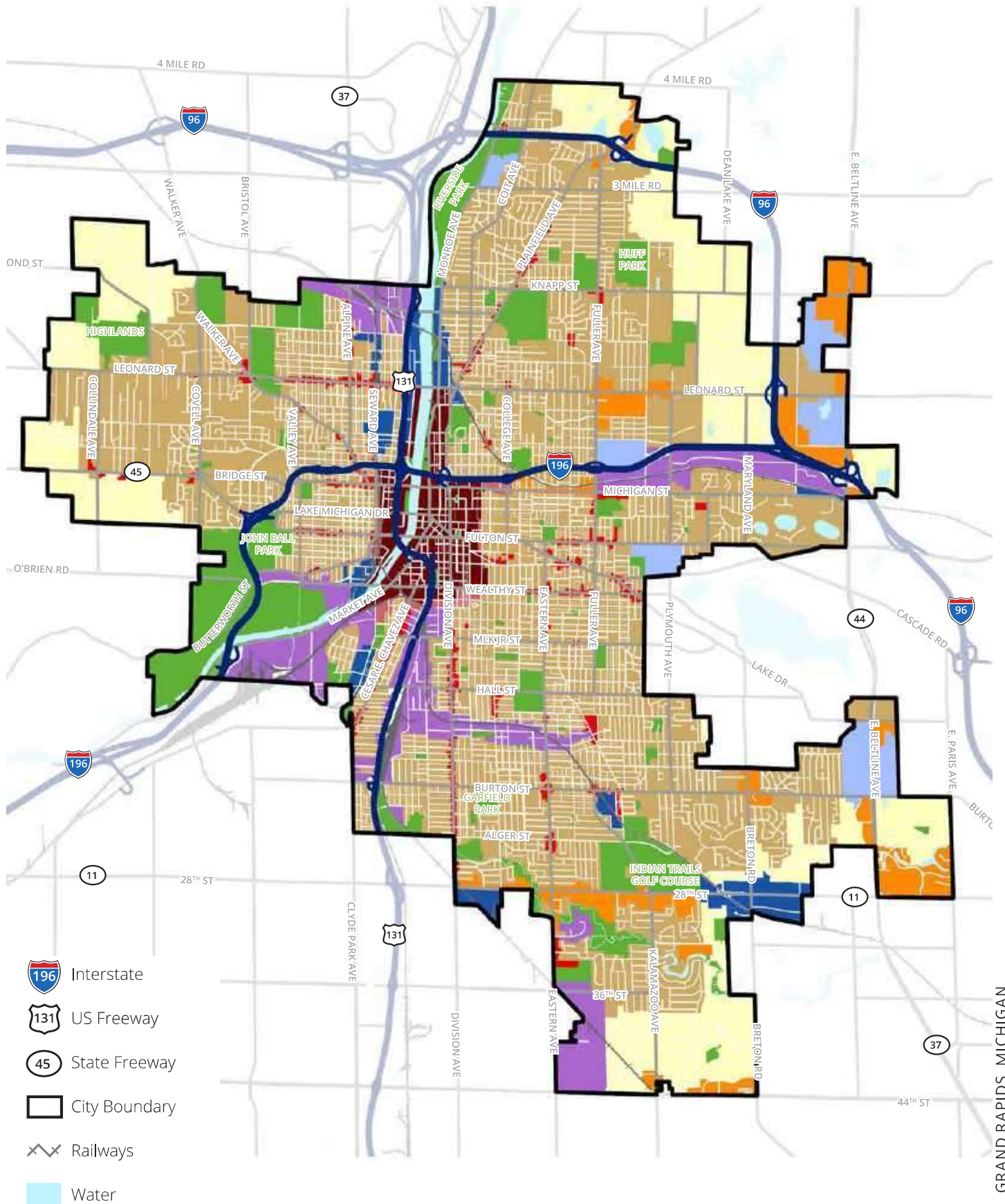
The Future Character and Land Use Map expresses the City’s intent for where and how Grand Rapids should use its land in the future with a particular focus on the character and qualities of development. Each character type describes the intent, land uses, building form, open space, and mobility options intended for the area. They encompass a range of conditions that can apply to places citywide. In this way, the Future Character and Land Use Map depicts appropriate future development patterns throughout the city. It reinforces existing patterns in some areas and supports changes to land use or development patterns in other areas.

The map is a tool for the City to guide decisions about future land use and development over time. It is not a mandate for development or redevelopment but describes the City’s expectations regarding the use and character of future development. It will serve as the basis for the City's future zoning ordinance updates and will be implemented through the administration of the zoning ordinance and various public and private development decisions.

-  **DOWNTOWN**
-  **TRANSITIONAL ACTIVITY CENTER**
-  **COMMUNITY ACTIVITY CENTER**
-  **NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER**
-  **COMPACT NEIGHBORHOOD**
-  **SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD**
-  **MANUFACTURING & LOGISTICS**
-  **CAMPUS**
-  **INNOVATION CENTER**
-  **PARKS AND OPEN SPACE**



## FUTURE CHARACTER AND LAND USE MAP







## IMPLEMENTING FUTURE CHARACTER

The Future Character and Land Use Map is implemented through the city's Zoning Ordinance. Grand Rapids will evolve with new development as Zoning Ordinance revisions responding to the goals of the CMP are adopted. Zoning is a legal tool that regulates land use, including types of structures that may be built, how they are to be built, where they are to be built, and how they may be used. Each property in the City is assigned to a zoning district. There may be more than one appropriate zoning category for a particular future land use category. The following pages indicate the existing zoning districts that may be appropriate to implement that character type.

Beyond zoning, the character types and design guidelines in this chapter provide additional flexibility and adaptability by encouraging buildings that are responsive to their physical context, supportive of pedestrian-friendly streets, and are designed with materials that will last. Staff and the Planning Commission will consider these elements when evaluating land use decisions with respect to how they conform to the direction in the Community Master Plan.

Describing neighborhood character requires a qualitative assessment. The character types in this chapter identify some of the defining features of the desired future state for different areas of the city that will influence new development design. It is not an exhaustive list of features to consider. Public input, Area Specific Plans, and context-specific implementation of the CMP can help ensure the city evolves in line with the development principles.

The table below distinguishes between the role of the Community Master Plan's Future Character and Land Use Map and the Zoning Ordinance.

### DEFINED DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

Attributes of urban form and function, including the size and type of buildings and their relationship to the street, the surrounding street and block pattern, parking and access, and land uses.

#### COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN

- Describes intended future land use and development characteristics
- Defines land uses and development characteristics generally (a policy guide)
- Not legally binding, but zoning changes should be “in accordance with” the Plan

#### ZONING ORDINANCE

- Defines land uses and development characteristics allowed on a piece of land today
- More specific and detailed than the Plan
- Legal document: departure from zoning requires either an Administrative Departure or a Special Land Use



## DOWNTOWN

### INTENT

Promote a dense development pattern focused on the close proximity of services, a diversity of uses, and dynamic building styles.

### LAND USE

- Many buildings contain multiple uses with restaurants or retail on the ground floor and office space or residential units above.

### BUILDING FORM

- Predominantly mid- or high-rise with commercial, institutional, multi-family, or a mix of uses.
- Buildings are located close to the street frontage with streetscape elements and designed with active ground floor uses to support a vibrant pedestrian environment.

### OPEN SPACE

- Built open spaces such as parks, plazas, courtyards, and outdoor recreational facilities.
- The visual impact of utilities on the public realm and open space is minimized, particularly within the "no pole" areas defined by City Ordinance.

### MOBILITY

- The transportation network supports a "park once" environment defined by a grid street pattern composed of short, walkable blocks.
- Mobility hubs with transit stations, pick-up and drop-off areas, bike parking, and micro-mobility options are provided.

### APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICT

- City Center
- Open Space

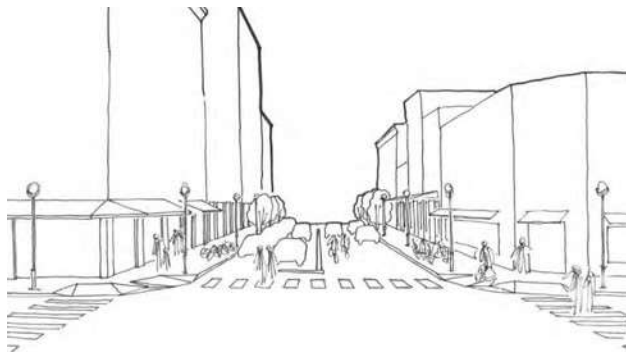
### EXAMPLE CHARACTER



### EXAMPLE PATTERN



### CONNECTION TO THE VITAL STREETS PLAN: URBAN CENTER





## TRANSITIONAL ACTIVITY CENTER

### INTENT

Provide a connection between downtown and the surrounding residential or commercial areas and transition the intensity of the downtown development pattern to adjacent areas.

### LAND USE

- Many buildings contain a mix of uses such as retail, office, and residential while others may be single-use office or housing.

### BUILDING FORM

- Predominantly mid-rise buildings.
- Buildings are typically located close to the street frontage. Some may have setbacks large enough to accommodate active street-level uses, such as outdoor dining.

### OPEN SPACE

- Built open spaces such as parks, plazas, courtyards, and outdoor recreational facilities.

### MOBILITY

- Defined by a grid street pattern composed of blocks that are similar or slightly larger than those in the center.
- Transit stations, pick-up and drop-off areas, bicycle parking and bicycle share, and micro-mobility options are provided.

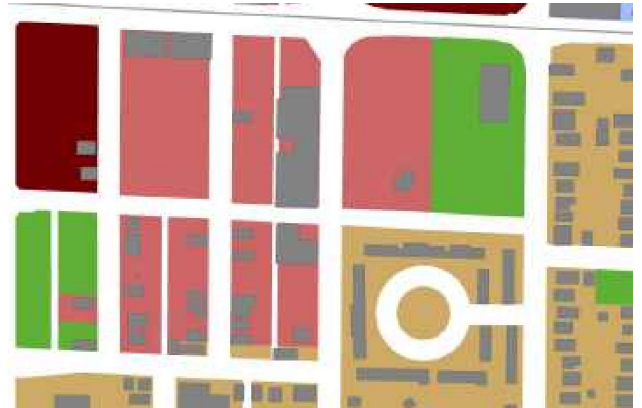
### APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- Transitional City Center
- Transit Oriented Development
- Open Space

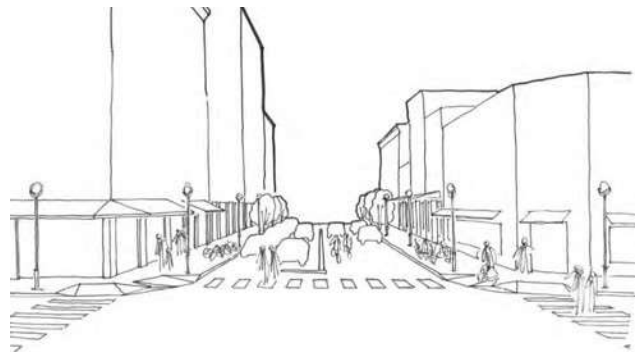
### EXAMPLE CHARACTER



### EXAMPLE PATTERN



### CONNECTION TO THE VITAL STREETS PLAN: URBAN CENTER



## COMMUNITY ACTIVITY CENTER

### INTENT

Provide places to live, work, and shop around key intersections and along corridors, to evolve areas into well-connected, walkable places within a 15-minute walk, bike, or transit trip of surrounding neighborhoods.

### LAND USE

- Many buildings contain a mix of uses such as retail, office, and residential with a few that may be single-use office or housing.
- These may currently include shopping centers or “big-box” stores along major corridors that are intended to redevelop with more density.

### BUILDING FORM

- Predominantly low- to mid-rise with commercial, institutional, multi-family, some light industrial or a mix of uses.
- New buildings are designed with active ground floor uses to support a more vibrant pedestrian environment along corridors.
- Lots are typically larger than in the Neighborhood Center but should evolve over time to create smaller lots with new connections.

### OPEN SPACE

- Built open spaces such as parks, plazas, courtyards, and outdoor recreational facilities.

### MOBILITY

- Typically located at or near key intersections or on major corridors with transit service.
- These areas have the potential to become less auto-oriented through incremental development and improved multi-modal infrastructure.
- The street network is or will redevelop to be well-connected, with walkable connections along streets and between destinations.

### APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- Commercial
- Neighborhood Office Service
- Planned Redevelopment
- Open Space

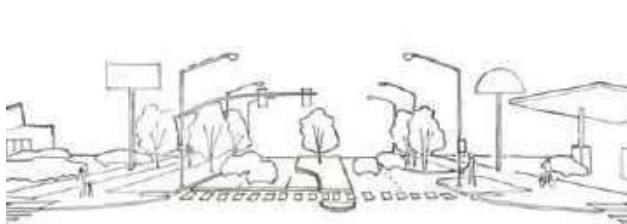
### EXAMPLE CHARACTER



### EXAMPLE PATTERN



### CONNECTION TO THE VITAL STREETS PLAN: CROSSTOWN CONNECTORS



## NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER

### INTENT

Reinforce a pedestrian and transit-friendly environment in a compact area and promote a mix of small-scale retail, service, entertainment, civic, office and residential uses to enhance the vitality of surrounding neighborhoods.

### LAND USE

- A variety of retail buildings, restaurants, and personal services at a local, neighborhood scale are provided.
- Commercial uses are concentrated at key intersections to promote walkability in line with the neighborhood nodes.
- Nodes are connected by a variety of housing options and some commercial uses along corridors.

### BUILDING FORM

- Typically low-rise buildings. Taller mid-rise buildings are appropriate at corners.
- Buildings are designed with active ground floor uses to support a vibrant pedestrian environment.

### OPEN SPACE

- Built open spaces may include plazas, patios, courtyards, small parks, and greenways.

### MOBILITY

- Directly accessible from nearby neighborhoods to encourage walking and cycling, and to support the concept of a complete neighborhood.
- The street network is well-connected, designed to slow traffic, and includes complete pedestrian facilities.

### APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- Traditional Business Area
- Neighborhood Office Service
- Transit Oriented Development
- Open Space

### EXAMPLE CHARACTER



### EXAMPLE PATTERN



### CONNECTION TO THE VITAL STREETS PLAN: NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS





## COMPACT NEIGHBORHOOD

### INTENT

Create, maintain, and promote a variety of housing opportunities while enhancing the desired physical characteristics of the City's existing neighborhoods. These areas support small-scale commercial uses and contribute to the vibrancy of Neighborhood Centers. These areas align with the Traditional Neighborhood and Mid-Century Neighborhood classifications.

### LAND USE

- Predominantly a mix of housing.
- Small office, commercial, religious, K-12 schools, and other civic uses are integrated at intersections or along major streets.

### BUILDING FORM

- Characterized by a mix of housing such as small-lot single-family, ADUs, townhomes or duplexes, and multi-family buildings.

### OPEN SPACE

- Privately-owned yards and recreation spaces, plazas, courtyards, rooftop decks, small parks, portions of school properties, and natural open spaces.

### MOBILITY

- Well-connected and dense street network with short blocks that accommodate walking, cycling, and transit use.

### APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- Low-Density Residential
- Mixed-Density Residential
- Neighborhood Office Service
- Planned Redevelopment
- Open Space

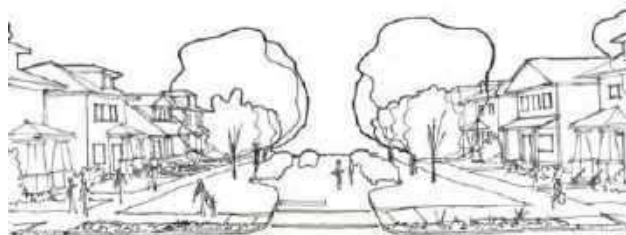
### EXAMPLE CHARACTER



### EXAMPLE PATTERN



### CONNECTION TO THE VITAL STREETS PLAN: NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTIAL





## SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

### INTENT

Build on the established development pattern, consisting predominantly of low-density residential development, to evolve these areas into more walkable neighborhoods with new housing types. These areas align with the Modern Era Neighborhood classification.

### LAND USE

- Primarily low-density housing.
- Compared to Compact Neighborhoods, these areas have a more uniform housing pattern with larger average lots and longer blocks.
- Religious, K-12 schools, and other civic uses are integrated at intersections or along major streets.

### BUILDING FORM

- Characterized by a range of housing sizes and styles, including duplexes and ADUs.
- Setbacks vary but are generally consistent within the block.
- Larger apartment complexes with shared open spaces are also common.

### OPEN SPACE

- Private yards and built common areas are typical.
- Public open spaces such as small parks, portions of school properties, and natural open spaces are also common.

### MOBILITY

- New development should support a well-connected local street network that provides safe and direct access to neighborhood destinations and helps disperse vehicle traffic.
- Culs-de-sac or curvilinear streets are common. Additional connections for vehicles, as well as people walking and bicycling, should be provided as redevelopment occurs.

### APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- Mixed-Density Residential
- Low-Density Residential
- Neighborhood Office Service
- Planned Redevelopment
- Open Space

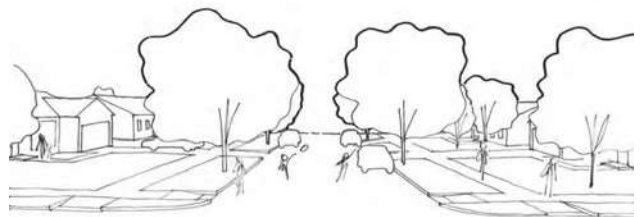
### EXAMPLE CHARACTER



### EXAMPLE PATTERN



### CONNECTION TO THE VITAL STREETS PLAN: NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTIAL



## INNOVATION CENTER

### INTENT

Create areas of mixed-use and employment, typically in established areas, that capitalize on the city's history and industry. Accommodate a broad range of flexible employment opportunities, with a focus on active ground floor uses abutting public streets to promote compact, walkable areas.

### LAND USE

- Academic, government, religious, or unique community-focused uses located across the city.
- These may also include office, research and development, studios, light manufacturing, hotels, multi-family residential, retail, restaurants, and services.

### BUILDING FORM

- Building form varies depending on the needs of the primary user, resulting in a range of building types and sizes.
- These areas may include older industrial structures that have been adaptively reused or retrofitted to include small retail, commercial, or maker spaces.
- New buildings are designed with active ground floor uses.

### OPEN SPACE

- Open spaces such as plazas, patios, and courtyards may include landscaping. Additional tree canopy should be prioritized in these spaces.
- Public spaces such as small parks and natural open spaces are also common.

### MOBILITY

- Streets serve all travel modes with frequent pedestrian crossings, medians, and refuges.
- Transit stations, pick-up and drop-off areas, bike parking, and micro-mobility options should be provided.

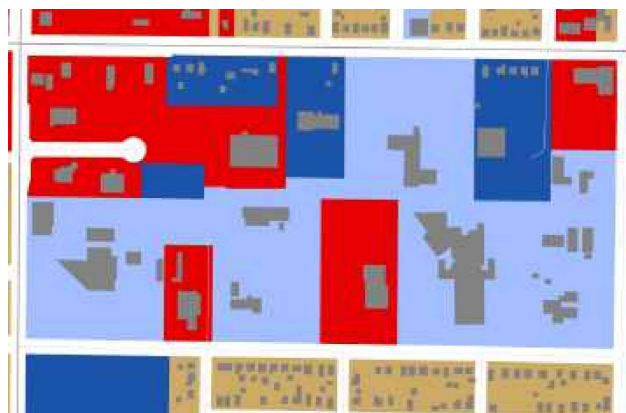
### APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- Transitional City Center
- Commercial
- Transit Oriented Development
- Mixed-Density Residential
- Planned Redevelopment
- Open Space

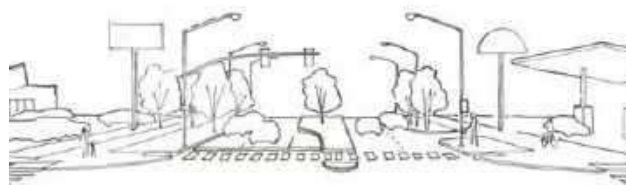
### EXAMPLE CHARACTER



### EXAMPLE PATTERN



### CONNECTION TO THE VITAL STREETS PLAN: CROSTOWN CONNECTORS



## MANUFACTURING & LOGISTICS

### INTENT

Reserve land for industrial activities. Allow for a wide range of types, services, and wage levels in sectors such as production, manufacturing, research, distribution, and logistics while minimizing impacts on adjacent land uses.

### LAND USE

- Primary uses include manufacturing, research and development, warehousing, distribution, and other similar uses.

### BUILDING FORM

- Characterized by large, often single-story buildings on large parcels set back from the street.

### OPEN SPACE

- Recreational facilities, picnic areas, walking trails, patios, and courtyards provided on individual sites for use by employees.
- Landscaping should be incorporated as a buffer between different land uses.

### MOBILITY

- Typically located along rail corridors or interstates. Streets and sites prioritize access for motor vehicle and truck traffic.
- Where possible, transit stations, bike parking and bike share, and micro-mobility options should be provided.

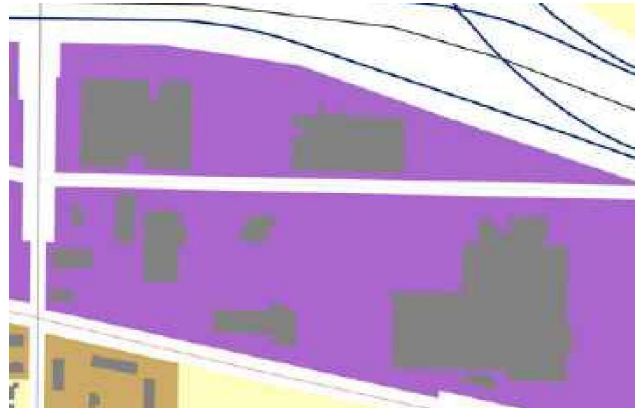
### APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- Industrial Transportation
- Commercial
- Planned Redevelopment
- Open Space

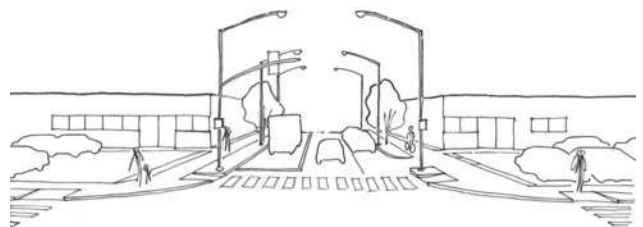
### EXAMPLE CHARACTER



### EXAMPLE PATTERN



### CONNECTION TO THE VITAL STREETS PLAN: MAKER/INDUSTRIAL





## CAMPUS

### INTENT

Campus areas are often master planned and include a variety of administrative, professional, educational, civic, religious, athletic or recreational, and medical office uses.

### LAND USE

- Defined by larger, campus-like settings with multiple buildings and defined edges.
- Uses are flexible and may change in response to changing development dynamics.

### BUILDING FORM

- Characterized by a wide range of development characteristics to match the operational needs of the organization.
- Typically larger footprint buildings with multiple stories offering flexible space for organizations.
- Sites are developed with large, shared parking areas adjacent to buildings with large setbacks from the street.

### OPEN SPACE

- Lawns, passive landscaped areas, park space, and natural open spaces are common.
- Improved open spaces such as plazas, courtyards, and outdoor recreational facilities may also be appropriate.
- Private plazas and pocket parks may serve as amenities for employees.

### MOBILITY

- Typically located along at least one major street with an internal street network that encourages walking and biking, particularly where sites are located near transit routes and stops.
- Streets may be publicly or privately maintained.

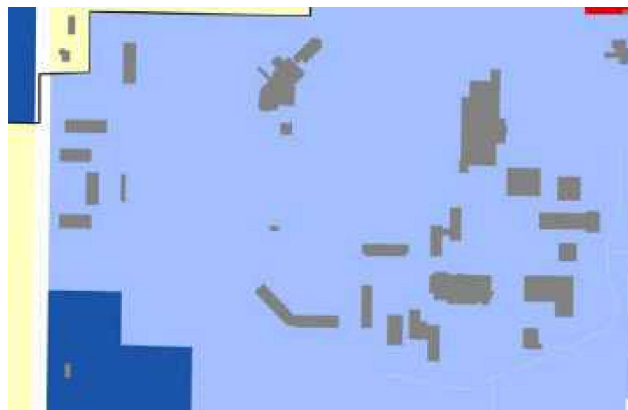
### APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- Institutional Campus
- Transit Oriented Development
- Planned Redevelopment
- Open Space

### EXAMPLE CHARACTER



### EXAMPLE PATTERN





## PARKS & OPEN SPACE

### INTENT

Accommodate natural parks or park-like settings and preserve identified open space land and uses from development pressures, including the Grand River and other environmental areas.

### LAND USE

- Support a variety of the city's parks and recreation programming.
- Open Space may range in scale from small community gardens or natural areas integrated into neighborhoods to large, regional parks.
- Includes private golf courses that function as open space.

### BUILDING FORM

- Building sizes vary depending on the purpose of the building and the setting, but are typically small and low-rise.
- Buildings may be necessary to support or service recreational and educational facilities.

### OPEN SPACE

- Open space is the primary element in this character type and is integrated throughout the city and includes both passive open spaces and active park facilities.

### MOBILITY

- Internal transportation networks typically consist of pedestrian and bicycle paths, but may include driveways and low-speed streets to provide access to internal facilities.

### APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- Open Space

### EXAMPLE CHARACTER



### EXAMPLE PATTERN



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## DESIGN GUIDELINES

Grand Rapids has an identified need for additional housing of all types and at all price points. In order to meet the demand for housing, all neighborhoods must allow for some change. The goal of the Design Guidelines is to ensure new development generally complements neighborhood patterns as density increases by providing guiding principles for new construction and significant renovations.

The Guidelines are organized into three related elements:

- 1. Design Tenets.** Foundational principles that reflect the overarching goals for development. They provide a framework for shaping the built environment, ensuring that new developments align with local identity and aspirations.
- 2. Design Guidelines.** Specific recommendations derived from the design tenets. They outline how to implement the tenets in practice, focusing on key aspects of design, such as aesthetics, functionality, and context.
- 3. Strategies.** Actionable techniques that can be employed to achieve the design guidelines. They provide suggestions and methods for implementation, helping to translate the broader guidelines into specific, tangible outcomes in the design and construction process.

The Design Guidelines offer general guidance for developers, the public, City staff, and decision-makers, focusing on how to use local context to inform design and approvals, without imposing a specific aesthetic or materials. They encourage best practices to ensure new developments are compatible with existing ones, allowing for flexibility and innovation as the city evolves. While they do not replace existing policies and regulations, these guidelines provide a framework rooted in the Development Principles, helping stakeholders evaluate new projects using qualitative measures. Thoughtful application of the guidelines during the development review process will support the collective vision for Grand Rapids.

## DESIGN TENETS

**Compatible**

Build on the context of the place and advance the vision of an applicable Area Specific Plan.

**Pedestrian Oriented**

Contribute to an active and inclusive public realm.

**High Quality**

Design resilient and visually interesting buildings.

## DESIGN GUIDELINES

**1**

Build on the local identity and aspiration of the place (site, block, or neighborhood).

**2**

Relate to the local architectural and development patterns.

**3**

Provide transitions from public to private spaces.

**4**

Provide usable spaces for social interaction.

**5**

Minimize the impact of parking areas and utilities.

**6**

Carry out a clear design strategy.

**7**

Utilize resilient, sustainable, and durable materials.

**8**

Integrate features that create visual interest.

## **1 Build on the local identity and aspiration of the place (site, block, or neighborhood).**

Strategies to meet this guideline:

- Integrate materials, building proportions, setbacks, entry features, and architectural details found within the area into new developments and alterations.
- Relate to significant community structures and spaces, such as historic resources, civic amenities, and natural areas.

## **2 Relate to the local architectural and development patterns.**

Strategies to meet this guideline:

- Minimize differences in scale between existing and new development with dormers, upper-level step-backs, and compatible roof forms.
- Relate to aspects of neighboring buildings through architectural style, roofline, detailing, color, or materials.
- Use trees and landscaping to enhance the building design and fit with the surrounding landscape context.
- Maintain consistent setbacks, continue patterns of entries, windows, and other characteristic features of the area.

## **3 Provide transitions from public to private spaces.**

Strategies to meet this guideline:

- Buffer ground floor residential units with landscaping for privacy.
- Use vertical separations (balconies or porches) to soften street edges and create semi-public spaces.
- Where provided, design landscaped setbacks and entry sequences that reflect nearby residential patterns.

## **4 Provide usable spaces for social interaction.**

Strategies to meet this guideline:

- Design porches to provide usable outdoor space. The height and depth should accommodate comfortable outdoor seating or play space.
- Design multi-unit development to include publicly visible gathering and play spaces in accessible locations. The focus in design should be on access and usability for residents.
- Outdoor spaces should be appropriately scaled for the use and neighborhood context and integrate features for year-round use.



## 5 Minimize the impact of parking areas and utilities.

Strategies to meet this guideline:

- Choose locations for vehicular access that minimize conflict between vehicles and non-motorists to the greatest extent practicable.
- Locate garages behind the rear wall of the house and take vehicle access from alleys where possible.
- Place mechanical units and utility connections away from the street-facing facades and provide appropriate screening.

## 6 Carry out a clear design strategy.

Strategies to meet this guideline:

- Design buildings such that their primary functions and uses can be readily determined from the exterior.
- Create a well-proportioned base, middle, and top to the building in locations where that pattern is established.

## 7 Utilize resilient, sustainable, and durable materials.

Strategies to meet this guideline:

- Building exteriors should be constructed of durable and maintainable materials.
- Materials that have texture, pattern, or lend themselves to a high quality of detailing are encouraged.
- Select durable and attractive materials that will age well in the local climate, taking special care to detail corners, edges, and transitions between materials.
- When possible, design the project so that it may be deconstructed at the end of its useful lifetime to allow reuse of materials.
- When possible, design for flexible uses over time so that buildings can be more easily converted as preferences and market factors evolve.

## 8 Integrate features that create visual interest.

Strategies to meet this guideline:

- Add depth to facades where appropriate by incorporating facade articulation, window depth, and material fenestration.
- Incorporate street-facing decks on upper stories of multi-family buildings to provide private open space visible to the adjacent street.
- Ensure coherent placement of window shape, size, depth, and patterning.

# 6. AREA SPECIFIC PLANS



The Community Master Plan provides a city-wide vision of how to direct and manage land use change in the community. In some instances, a more detailed approach is required to ensure appropriate consideration is given to detailed issues. Area specific planning provides the opportunity to more closely examine a particular geographic area of the city and tailor appropriate recommendations to the needs of area residents, businesses, and property owners.

These plans provide a closer analysis of an area than the city-wide Community Master Plan by establishing more specific uses, roadway alignments and design treatments, and necessary public facilities and amenities needed to make a neighborhood, mixed-use area, or business district a success.

They can also serve as a catalyst to organize neighborhoods, increase citizen technical skills, and attract desired private sector investment. To be effective, area specific planning efforts must be collaborative, involving residents, business organizations, institutions, City representatives, property owners and/or developers. This collaborative effort results in detailed plans that balance varied interests and build on the recommendations in the CMP.

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## PURPOSE

Area specific planning is an effective way to ensure that land use and development goals for a particular area of the city are identified to protect its unique identity while encouraging reinvestment and revitalization. These plans provide a closer analysis of an area than a city-wide Community Master Plan by establishing a specific mix of uses and building types, roadway alignments and design treatments, and necessary public facilities and amenities needed to make a neighborhood, mixed-use area, or business district a success.

Formally, such plans may be officially adopted into the City's Community Master Plan. Informally, they can serve as a catalyst to organize neighborhoods, increase citizen technical skills, and attract desired private sector investment. To be effective, area specific planning efforts must be collaborative, involving residents, business organizations, institutions, City representatives, property owners, and/or developers. This collaborative team will work together to craft detailed plans that balance varied interests and build on the Community Master Plan's recommendations.

In addition to the benefit of a more detailed area analysis, neighborhood and area specific plans can be utilized for the following purposes:

- Implementating the Community Master Plan.
- Allocating Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding.
- Guiding transportation enhancement projects.
- Ensuring concurrent public investment within a given geographic area.
- Guiding strategic investment by community foundations and other non-profit organizations.



## PLANNING AREAS

Area specific plans may be prepared for a block, a neighborhood, a business district, or a larger area. These plans should be developed as a complement to the Community Master Plan. They may be undertaken in response to a development proposal or as a proactive planning study. Area specific planning is recommended for the following areas as identified on the Future Character and Land Use Map:

- Community Activity Centers
- Neighborhood Centers
- Nodes
- Significant Corridors
- Areas with emerging transit or trail-oriented development opportunities

In addition, planning may be required in areas where the land use regulations in place fail to satisfy the objectives of the city-wide Community Master Plan, or where the Planning Commission has determined that due to the scale or impact of a proposed development additional analysis is required.

## NOTE

### DATA

Important information to collect concerning the built environment may include:

- Height and massing of buildings
- Size of parcels
- Setbacks from the street
- Placement of entrances and windows
- Walls and fences
- Parking area design and relationship to buildings
- Road widths, sidewalks, curb cuts, medians
- Street pattern
- Patterns of movement e.g. pedestrian connections, access to transportation/transit)
- Street furniture (e.g. bus stops, street lights, signs)
- Landscaping materials, both planting and hardscape
- Public infrastructure (e.g. drainage facilities, bridges)
- Social interaction opportunities
- Relationship between built and natural environment
- Architectural styles and traditions
- Infill opportunities

## PLANNING PROCESS

A work plan should be used in preparing a neighborhood or area specific study. A specific planning approach is not mandated by state law; however, the following suggested process has proven itself over time to produce effective results. This approach may be modified based upon the purpose of the area specific plan. Active public participation and stakeholder engagement throughout the entire planning process is an essential component of a successful planning process.

- **Collect Data.** Research, collect, and analyze information on the physical, social, and economic characteristics of the study area.
- **Identify Problems and Opportunities.** Define key planning and urban design problems and opportunities.
- **Formulate Goals.** Define goals and translate them into objectives and priorities.
- **Preliminary Plan.** Formulate and evaluate plan alternatives to develop a preliminary plan.
- **Refine Plan.** Review and refine the plan and approve the end product as the neighborhood/area specific plan.
- **Adoption.** Present the plan to the appropriate bodies for adoption.
- **Implementation.** Once adopted, the plan should be used as a standard for gaining site plan approval. Initiate implementation actions.
- **Continuing Planning.** Monitor and evaluate progress. Update and revise the plan as needed.

## AREA SPECIFIC PLAN ELEMENTS

An area specific plan should attempt to achieve several goals in order to be considered for adoption as an amendment to the Community Master Plan. These goals strive to ensure consistency with the policies and recommendations of the Community Master Plan and other City of Grand Rapids documents. Plans will:

- Represent the recommendations of the Community Master Plan.
- Promote compatibility with the existing character of an area.
- Reflect standards and design guidelines for land uses and development character as identified in the Community Master Plan.
- Promote transit and walkability.
- Assign appropriate and reasonable land use classifications.
- Identify, if necessary, additional infrastructure improvements.

The following elements are recommended in an area specific plan to achieve the above listed goals. Additional elements may be included beyond this list, particularly if a neighborhood and/or business association has undertaken a planning effort. In many neighborhood plans, additional social issues, traditionally not addressed by a land use plan, may be included. Therefore, portions of a plan, rather than the complete document, may be selected to amend the City's Community Master Plan. At a minimum, an area specific plan should contain:

- Neighborhood/area specific boundaries
- Neighborhood/area specific character description
- Purpose or intent of plan
- Description of planning process
- List of stakeholders involved in the process
- Relationship to other plans, policies, and regulations
- Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis or other issue identification mechanism for the planning area
- Existing conditions
- Land use and design goals/objectives
- Alternatives, preferred alternative, and/or conceptual site plan (if for a small area)
- Plan recommendations (proposed land use, infrastructure investments, desired design guidelines, etc.)
- Action plan

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## ADOPTED AREA SPECIFIC PLANS

To date, the City has completed 11 Area Specific Plans (ASP), all of which carry forward with the adoption of the CMP. Three additional ASPs were identified for development through a collaborative process. Staff selected initial options based on location (representative of all three wards), development pressure, and neighborhood desire. The Steering Committee then narrowed down the choices with the help of the Planning Team. The final selections were affirmed by the Planning Commission.

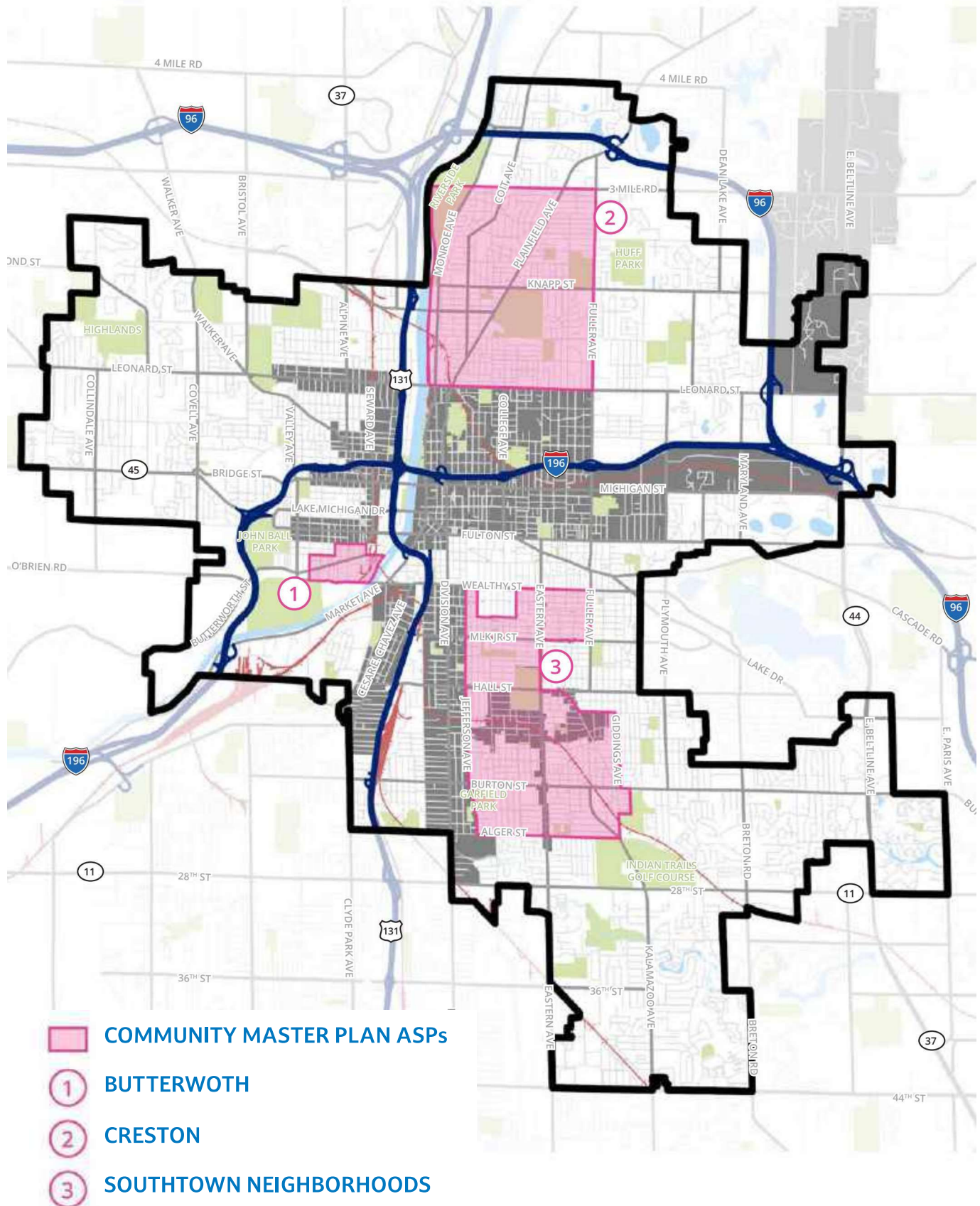
The following plans have been adopted as part of this Community Master Plan:

- Butterworth Area Specific Plan
- Creston Area Specific Plan
- Southtown Neighborhoods Area Specific Plan

These plans shall serve as a complement to the Community Master Plan. The City of Grand Rapids Community Master Plan, adopted December 2024, shall supersede an area specific plan or other earlier City land use plans if an inconsistency exists.



## AREA SPECIFIC PLAN LOCATIONS



# BUTTERWORTH

## OVERVIEW

The Butterworth Area Specific Plan (ASP) is the culmination of a series of community input and feedback sessions with the neighborhood. The ASP outlines the community's vision for the future of the neighborhood and defines the steps necessary to achieve that vision. This includes both short- and long-term strategies related to land use, housing, economic development, transportation, and public space.

The Butterworth ASP is bounded by the following streets: Watson, Lexington, Butterworth, Front, Wealthy, Marion, Park, and Deloney. Butterworth contains a mix of industrial uses along the river and existing rail corridors, a commercial corridor on Butterworth Street, and traditional residential neighborhoods. Defining features within or adjacent to the study area include the Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Pew Campus, the Grand River, Westtown Commons Park, the Padnos scrap yard, the former Butterworth Landfill, regional trail connections, and the future Acrisure Amphitheater across the river.

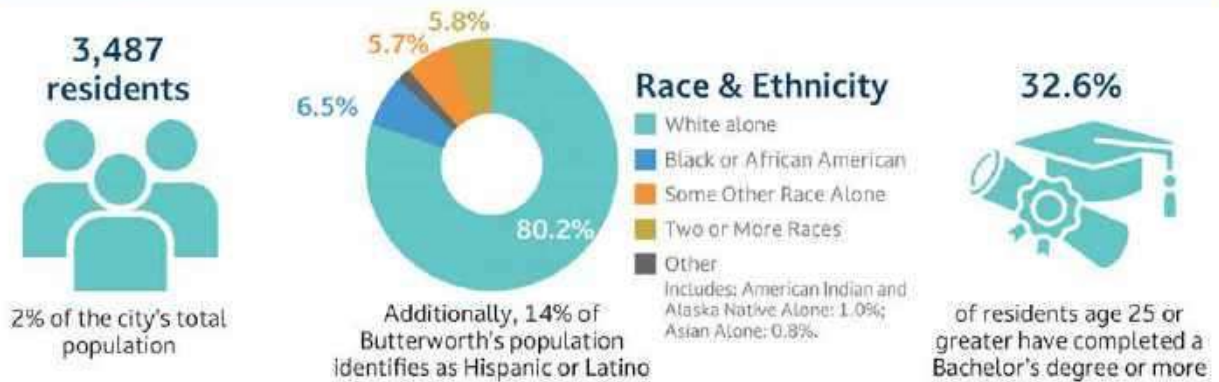
## RELATIONSHIP TO COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN AND OTHER PLANS

The Community Master Plan (CMP) acts as a blueprint, outlining a vision and broad objectives along with detailed recommendations to achieve them. Building on this foundation, the Area Specific Plans (ASPs) adhere to the same principles and provide more detailed strategies. These plans illustrate how the overarching vision and goals of the CMP are tailored and implemented to meet the unique needs of individual neighborhoods. Additionally, citywide planning initiatives such as the Vital Streets Plan, Bicycle Action Plan, the Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan, Grand Rapids/Kent County Housing Needs Assessment, Grand River Equity Framework, and others offer further recommendations.

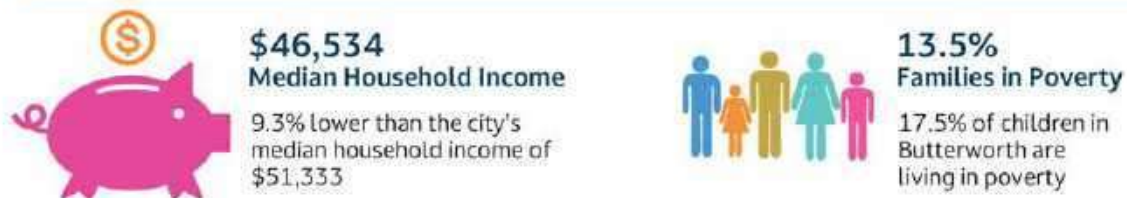
## NEIGHBORHOOD TODAY

Source: U.S. Census ACS 2020 & 2022 (5-Year Estimates) - Census Tract 27, Kent County, Michigan

### POPULATION



### INCOMES



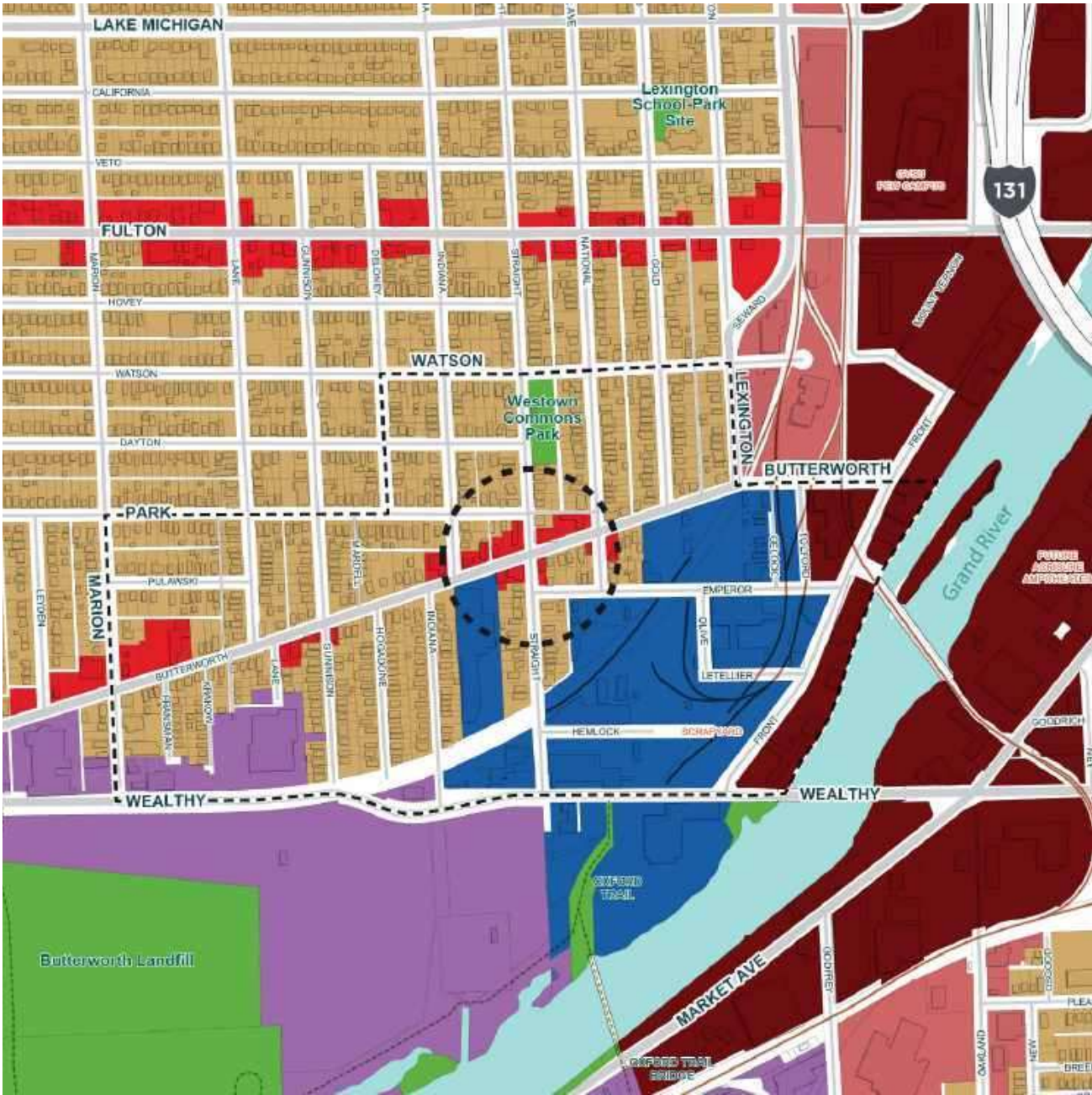
### HOUSING





# NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE FUTURE

## FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER MAP AND NODES



Legend

- Neighborhood Study Area
- Neighborhood Nodes
- Downtown
- Transitional Activity Center
- Community Activity Center
- Neighborhood Center
- Compact Neighborhood
- Suburban Neighborhood
- Manufacturing & Logistics
- Campus
- Innovation Center
- Parks and Open Space



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## COMMUNITY GOALS

### 01

#### SUSTAINABLE, EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

This goal relates to the **Great Neighborhoods** and **Desirable Development Character** goals found in the Community Master Plan.

### 02

#### A VIBRANT AND THRIVING BUSINESS COMMUNITY

This goal relates to the **Vital Business Districts** and **A Strong Economy** goals found in the Community Master Plan.

### 03

#### SAFER, WALKABLE AND BIKEABLE STREETS

This goal relates to the **Vital Business Districts** and **Balanced Mobility** goals found in the Community Master Plan.

### 04

#### BEAUTIFUL NEIGHBORHOODS AND HEALTHY, ACTIVE COMMUNITY SPACES

This goal relates to the **Great Neighborhoods** goal found in the Community Master Plan.

# CRESTON

## OVERVIEW

The Creston Area Specific Plan (ASP) is the culmination of a series of community input and feedback sessions with the neighborhood. The ASP outlines the community's vision for the future of the neighborhood and defines the steps necessary to achieve that vision. This includes both short- and long-term improvements related to land use, housing, economic development, transportation, and public space.

The Creston ASP is bounded by the Grand River and the following streets: 3 Mile Road, Fuller Avenue, and Leonard Street. Creston is primarily a residential community with industrial areas along the rail lines and Monroe Avenue, and a commercial corridor along Plainfield Avenue that bisects the neighborhood diagonally. Defining features within or adjacent to the study area include Riverside Park, Kent Country Club, the Plainfield commercial districts, and the Grand River.

## RELATIONSHIP TO COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN AND OTHER PLANS

The Community Master Plan (CMP) acts as a blueprint, outlining a vision and broad objectives along with detailed recommendations to achieve them. Building on this foundation, the Area Specific Plans (ASPs) adhere to the same principles and provide more detailed strategies. These plans illustrate how the overarching vision and goals of the CMP are tailored and implemented to meet the unique needs of individual neighborhoods. Additionally, citywide planning initiatives such as the Vital Streets Plan, Bicycle Action Plan, the Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan, Grand Rapids/Kent County Housing Needs Assessment, Grand River Equity Framework, and others offer further recommendations.

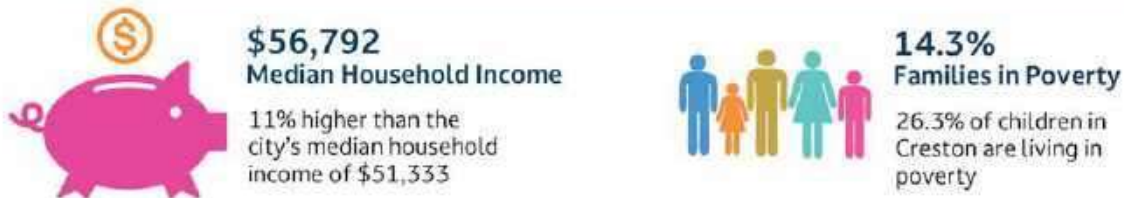
## NEIGHBORHOOD TODAY

Source: U.S. Census ACS 2020 & 2022 (5-Year Estimates) - Census Tracts 4, 5, 9, 10, and 13, Kent County, Michigan

### POPULATION



### INCOMES



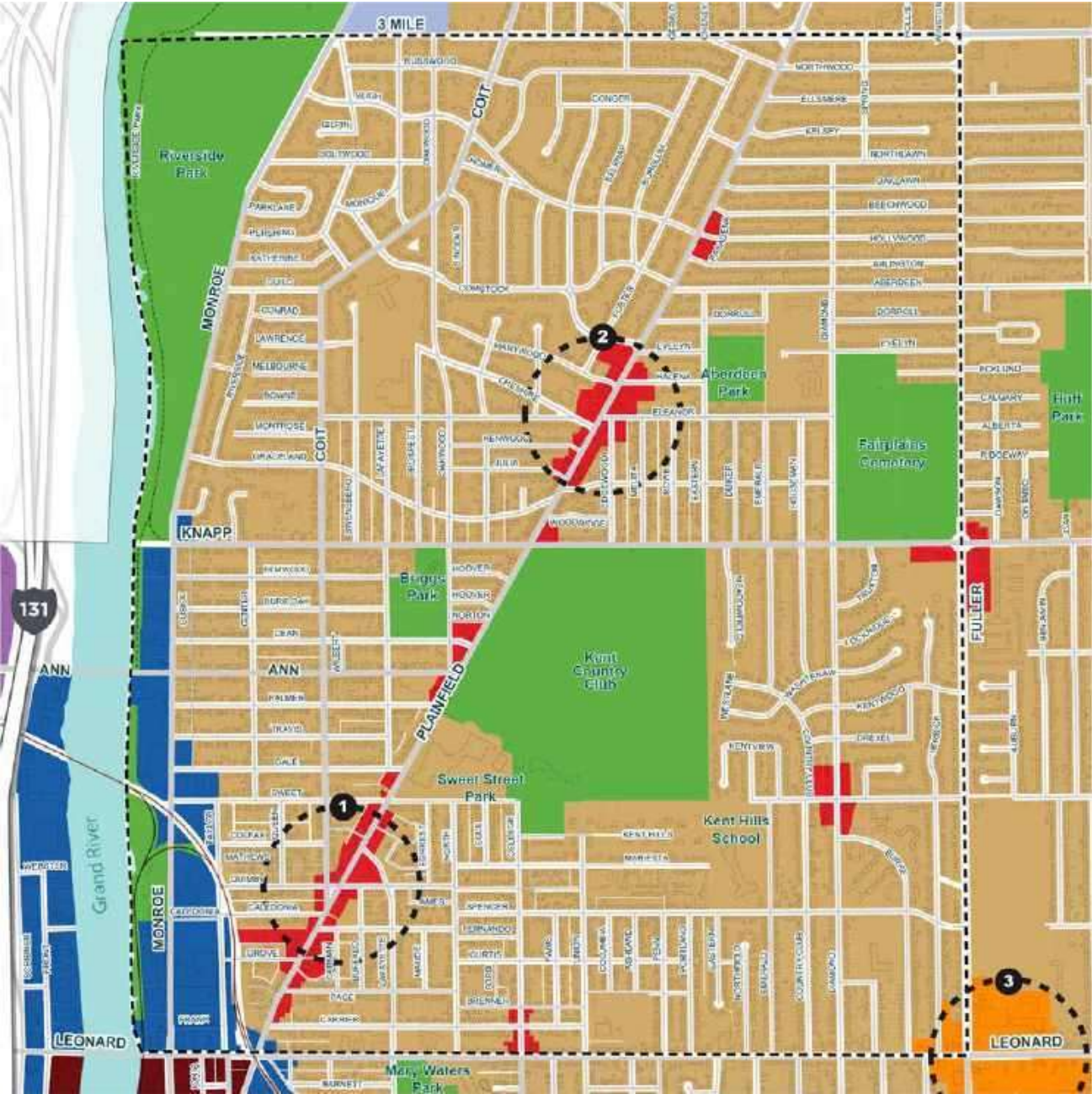
### HOUSING

#### Housing by Geography

	1 North of Knapp	2 South of Knapp	3 Plainfield, Sweet, College
Homeownership Rate	89%	54%	29%
Median Home Values	\$155k	\$132k	\$112k
Rents	\$1,180 per month	\$880 per month	\$938 per month
Cost-Burdened Homes (paying 30%+)	24%: owners 57%: renters	26%: owners 50%: renters	32%: owners 57%: renters

NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE FUTURE

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER MAP AND NODES



Neighborhood Study Area

Neighborhood Nodes

- 1 Plainfield Avenue and Quimby Street
- 2 Plainfield Avenue and Eleanor Street
- 3 Fuller Avenue and Leonard Street

- Downtown
- Transitional Activity Center
- Community Activity Center
- Neighborhood Center
- Compact Neighborhood

- Suburban Neighborhood
- Manufacturing & Logistics
- Campus
- Innovation Center
- Parks and Open Space



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## COMMUNITY GOALS

### 01

## AFFORDABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

This goal relates to the **Great Neighborhoods** and **Desirable Development Character** goals found in the Community Master Plan.

### 02

## A LIVELY AND UNIQUE NEIGHBORHOOD (AKA KEEP CRESTON FUNKY)

This goal relates to the **Vital Business Districts** and **A Strong Economy** goals found in the Community Master Plan.

### 03

## SAFER STREETS FOR BICYCLING AND WALKING

This goal relates to the **Balanced Mobility** goal found in the Community Master Plan.

### 04

## REVITALIZED AND CONNECTED OPEN SPACES

This goal relates to the **Great Neighborhoods** goal found in the Community Master Plan.

# SOUTHTOWN

## OVERVIEW

The Southtown Neighborhoods Area Specific Plan (ASP) is the culmination of a series of community input and feedback sessions with the neighborhood. The ASP outlines the community's vision for the future of the neighborhood and defines the steps necessary to achieve that vision.

The Southtown Neighborhoods ASP is bounded by the following streets: Wealthy, Lafayette, Pleasant, Union, Fuller, MLK, Eastern, Hall, Kalamazoo, Adams, Giddings, Burton, Oakfield, Alger, and Jefferson. Southtown contains pockets of residential neighborhoods bounded by commercial streets on the major north/south and east/west thoroughfares. Industrial uses line the freight rail corridor that cuts through the neighborhood. Defining features within or adjacent to the study area include Pleasant Park, Oakhill Cemetery, Garfield Park, and the commercial corridors on Division Street, Madison Avenue, Eastern Avenue, and Kalamazoo Avenue.

## RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN AND OTHER PLANS

The Community Master Plan (CMP) acts as a blueprint, outlining a vision and broad objectives along with detailed recommendations to achieve them. Building on this foundation, the Area Specific Plans (ASPs) adhere to the same principles and provide more detailed recommendations. These plans illustrate how the overarching vision and goals of the CMP are tailored and implemented to meet the unique needs of individual neighborhoods. Additionally, citywide planning initiatives such as the Vital Streets Plan, Bicycle Action Plan, the Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan, Grand Rapids/Kent County Housing Needs Assessment, Grand River Equity Framework, and others offer further recommendations.

To date, Southtown and adjacent neighborhoods have had three studies: the 2019 Southtown Business Area Specific Plan, the 2019 South Division Corridor Plan and the Rapid's 2021 Division United Plan.

The Southtown Neighborhoods ASP builds on the findings and recommendations of all of these but most specifically the Southtown Business Area Specific Plan (BASP) from 2019, the purpose of which was to create a roadmap for improving commercial corridors and public spaces in the neighborhood. This Plan complements that work by focusing on the neighborhoods adjacent to those commercial corridors, specifically looking at the parcels not covered in the previous process with a special focus on issues and opportunities related to housing, affordability, and development/redevelopment.

## NEIGHBORHOOD TODAY

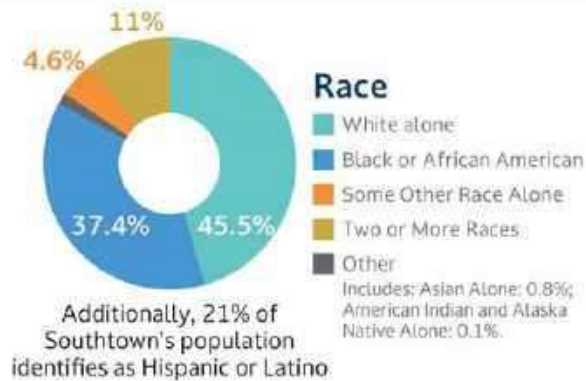
Source: U.S. Census ACS 2020 & 2022 (5-Year Estimates)  
Census Tracts 29, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 41, and 42, Kent County, Michigan

### POPULATION


**35,358**  
residents



17.7% of the city's total population



**29.1%**



of residents age 25 or greater have completed a Bachelor's degree or more

### INCOMES



**\$45,391**  
Median Household Income

11.6% lower than the city's median household income of \$51,333



**18.8%**  
Families in Poverty

32.5% of children in Southtown are living in poverty

### HOUSING



**61.2%**  
Homeownership Rate

6.2 percentage points higher than the city's homeownership rate of 55%



**\$168,478**  
Median Home Value in 2022

This represents a 31% increase since 2020 when the Median Home Value was \$128,848.



**\$1,188**  
Median Gross Rent in 2022

This represents a 15% increase since 2020 when the Median Gross Rent was \$1,034.



**26.8%**  
Homeowners with a mortgage are cost-burdened

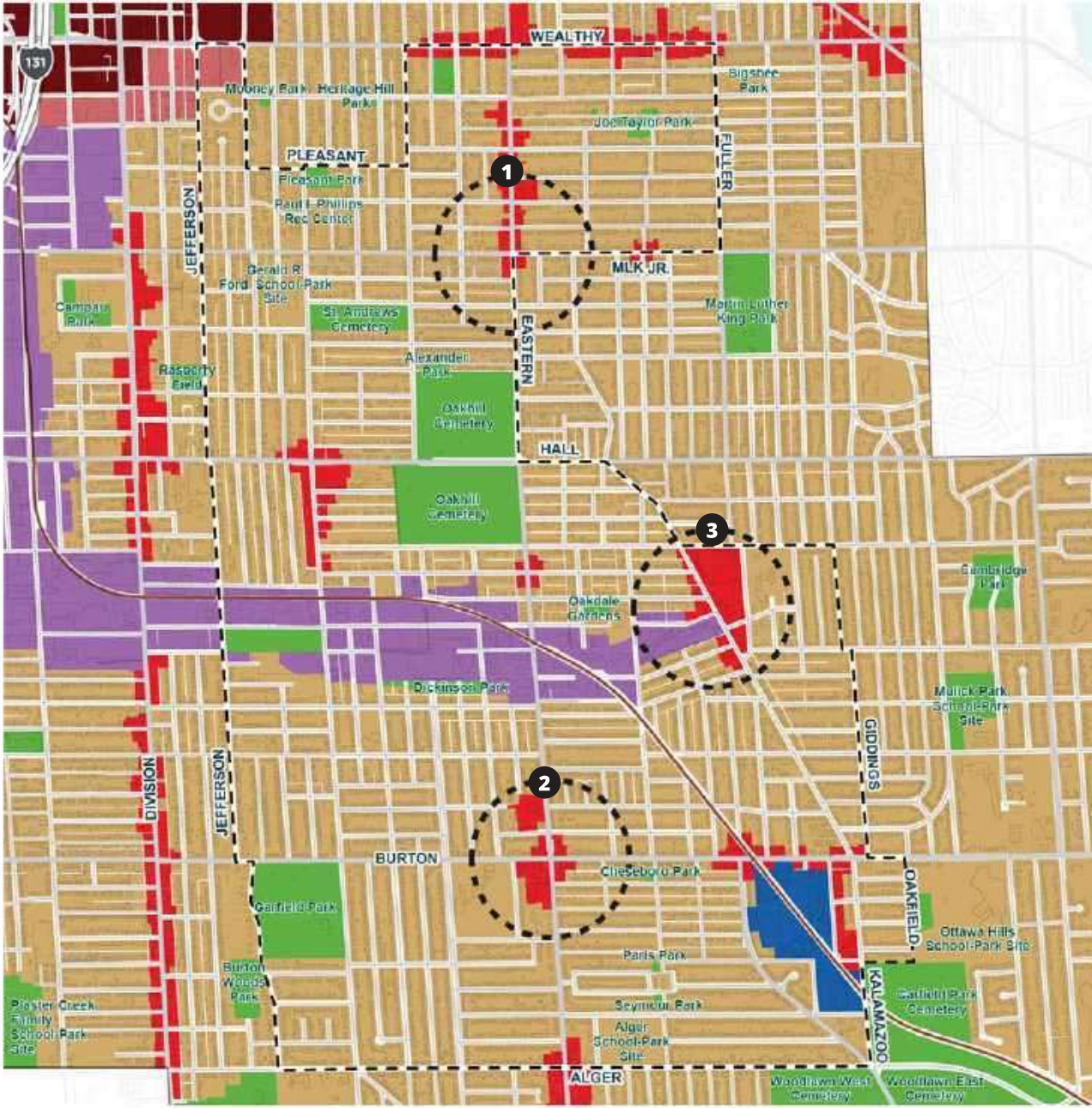
**57.9%**  
Of renters are cost-burdened

A household is considered cost-burdened when 30% or more of household income is spent on housing



NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE FUTURE

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER MAP AND NODES



Legend

Neighborhood Study Area

Neighborhood Nodes

- 1 Eastern Avenue and MLK Jr. Street
- 2 Seymour Square
- 3 Boston Square

- Downtown
- Transitional Activity Center
- Community Activity Center
- Neighborhood Center
- Compact Neighborhood

- Suburban Neighborhood
- Manufacturing & Logistics
- Campus
- Innovation Center
- Parks and Open Space



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## COMMUNITY GOALS

### 01

## DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT DISPLACEMENT

This goal relates to the **Great Neighborhoods**, **Vital Business Districts** and **Balanced Mobility** goals found in the Community Master Plan.

### 02

## A COMMUNITY BUILT BY ALL FOR ALL

This goal relates to the **Great Neighborhoods** and **Desirable Development Character** goals found in the Community Master Plan.

### 03

## PRESERVE LOCAL CULTURE

This goal relates to the **Great Neighborhoods**, **Vital Business Districts**, and **Desirable Development Character** goals found in the Community Master Plan.

# IMPLEMENTATION

## HOW TO USE THE PLAN

The Bridge to Our Future Community Master Plan should be used on a daily basis as public and private decisions are made concerning development, redevelopment, capital improvements, and other land use decisions affecting Grand Rapids. The following is a summary of how decisions and processes should align with the goals, objectives, and recommendations of the Plan.

### ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMS AND BUDGETS

Individual departments, administrators, boards, and commissions should be cognizant of the recommendations of the Plan when preparing annual work programs and budgets.

### DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS

Administrative and legislative approvals of development proposals, including rezonings, should be a central means of implementing the Plan. Decisions by the Planning Commission and City Commission should reference relevant Community Master Plan recommendations. The Zoning Ordinance and related regulations under the authority of the Planning Department should be updated in response to what is presented in the Plan.

### CAPITAL PLAN

The City should incorporate the recommendations of the CMP into the Capital Plan. Proposed projects should be reviewed and prioritized to ensure adequate funding for capital projects and maintenance, particularly in the City's business districts.

### ECONOMIC INITIATIVES

Economic development programs should be reviewed to ensure they support the recommendations of the Plan wherever possible.

### PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS

Property owners and developers should consider the goals and recommendations of the Plan in their land planning and investment decisions. Public decision-makers will use the Plan as a guide in their deliberations on zoning matters and development analysis. Property owners and developers should be cognizant of and complement the Plan's recommendations.

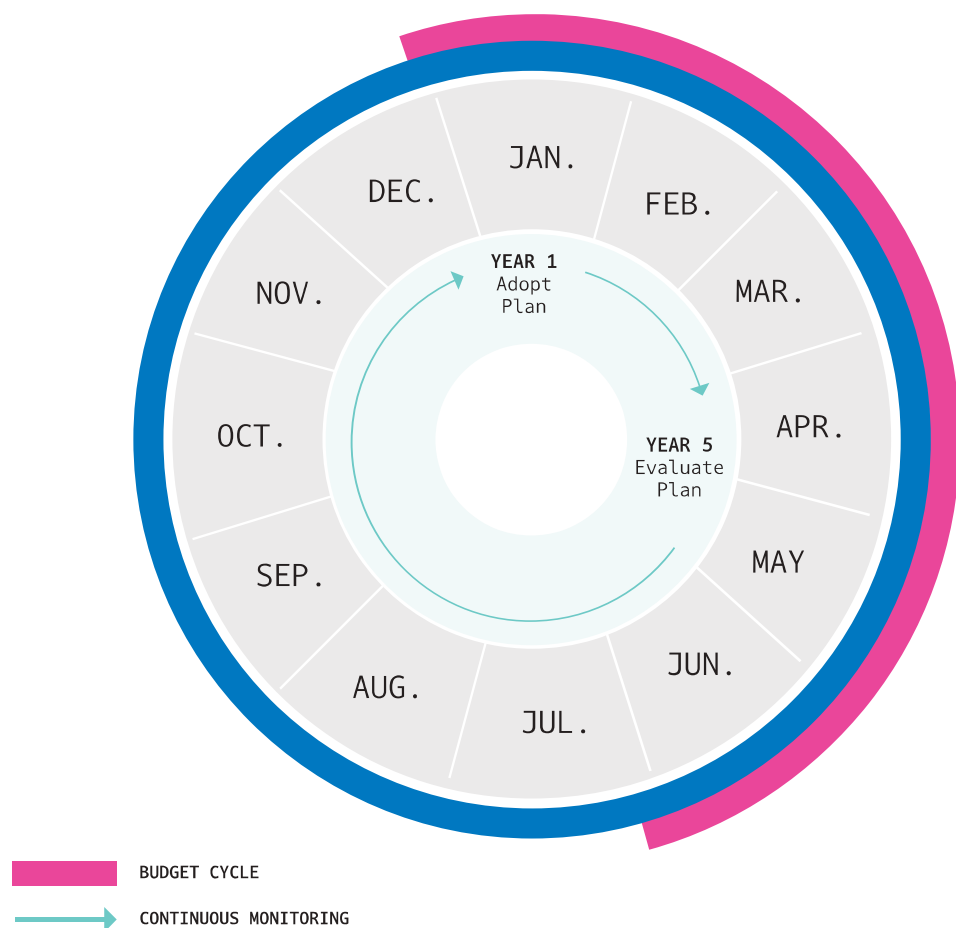
## PROPOSED PLAN MANAGEMENT CYCLE

### MONITORING

The Plan should be monitored on a regular basis for implementation effectiveness and relevancy. As referenced previously, it will be monitored annually in the development of departmental work programs, budgets, and capital improvements planning. A formal review of the Plan's accomplishments and relevancy should occur within five-year intervals.

### UPDATING

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act provides the legal basis for the master plan. The act outlines requirements for the preparation, content, public review, adoption and regular review and update of the plan. The update should be considered at least every five years. There may be circumstances that warrant formal amendment of the Plan, including adoption of the Area Specific Plans and Corridor Plans." Amendments to the Plan should be made only with careful consideration and compelling justification.





## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following table summarizes the Plan's actions. The table is organized by chapter and objective. For each action, the table indicates the type of action, its timeframe, partners, and whether it aligns with or supports a specific Value Thread. Bold text indicates who is anticipated to lead the effort. The City welcomes additional partners beyond those identified.



### VALUE THREADS

**Equity:** Where all residents have access to resources that allow for opportunity, influence, and positive life outcomes no matter their starting point.



**Safety:** Where all people are secure and protected in all communities no matter where they live, come from, or look like.



**Vibrancy:** A variety of amenities including arts, culture, and recreation opportunities that activate and contribute to the energy of the City year-round.



**Culture:** Traditions and experiences that originate from one's background and lived experiences and can be shared and celebrated with others.



**Sustainability:** Balancing growth, environmental stewardship, and well-being in a way that fulfills current and ongoing needs while not compromising the needs of future generations.

### ACTION CATEGORIES



**Regulations:** Actions that could be implemented through the Framework zoning ordinance update or other updates to City ordinances.



**Capital Project:** Physical improvements to City facilities and infrastructure.



**Program:** Programs or initiatives that may require some ongoing City support or participation.



**Policy:** Direction used on an ongoing basis to guide City decisions.

### TIMEFRAME

**S**

Short-term (1-5 years)

**M**

Medium-term (5-10 years)

**L**

Long-term (10-20 years)














Ongoing: currently occurring on a repeating basis

Recommendation	Value	Category	Timeframe	Responsibility	Partners
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# 1 GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS






## 1.A CREATE COMPLETE AND STABLE NEIGHBORHOODS.

1.A.1	Regularly update the Grand Rapids and Kent County Housing Needs Assessment to guide creation and preservation of affordable housing.		P, O		<b>Executive Office, Community Development, Economic Development</b>	
1.A.2	Implement design guidelines that build upon existing neighborhood development.	 	R	S	<b>Planning Department</b>	
1.A.3	Improve the relationship between higher-intensity and lower-intensity uses.		R	S	<b>Planning Department</b>	
1.A.4	Ensure public information about residential infill development is easy to access.		P	S, M	<b>Planning Department</b>	
1.A.5	Develop an anti-displacement strategy.	 	O	S	<b>Economic Development, Community Development, Planning Department</b>	
1.A.6	Streamline the process to create condominium forms of ownership.		P	M	<b>Economic Development, Community Development, Planning Department</b>	
1.A.7	Advocate for removal of state-level barriers to housing affordability and stability.		O	S, M	<b>Executive Office, Community Development, Planning Department</b>	

Recommendation		Value	Category	Timeframe	Responsibility	Partners
1.A.8	Provide adequate resources to meet community needs.	 	C, O	M, L	<b>Executive Office, City Commission,</b> Community Development, GRPD, GRFD, Planning Department	
1.A.9	Support efforts to provide small-scale developer training to residents.		P	S	<b>Economic Development, Planning Department,</b> Environmental Services, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc.	Grand Rapids Land Bank Authority
1.A.10	Work with the larger metropolitan community to provide safe, stable, and affordable housing options.	  	P		<b>Community Development, Planning Department,</b> Economic Development	Grand Rapids Land Bank Authority

## 1.B EXPAND THE VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES AND PRICE POINTS.
















1.B.1	Support programs that encourage housing diversity based on income and housing types.	  	P		<b>Economic Development,</b> Community Development, Planning Department	Grand Rapids Land Bank Authority
1.B.2	Allow a greater variety of housing types in low-density residential zone districts.		R	S	<b>Planning Department</b>	
1.B.3	Allow higher density residential in the Mid-Century and Modern Era neighborhoods.		R	S	<b>Planning Department</b>	






Recommendation	Value	Category	Timeframe	Responsibility	Partners
1.B.4 Assess and reduce barriers to innovative housing solutions (such as modular construction, prefabricated materials, and new building methods).		R, O	M	<b>Building Department, Planning Department</b>	
1.B.5 Continue to increase homeownership opportunities.		P, O		<b>Community Development, Economic Development, Planning Department</b>	Grand Rapids Land Bank Authority
1.B.6 Support Community Development efforts described in the Community Development fair housing plan.		O		<b>Community Development, Executive Office</b>	Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

## 1.C INTEGRATE SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES INTO DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS.

1.C.1 Encourage modifications for new or substantially remodeled housing units that improve access for people with limited mobility.	  	R	S	<b>Community Development, Planning Department</b>	Disability Advocates of Kent County
1.C.2 Continue to enhance community assets through additional investments.	  	C		<b>Parks Department, Planning Department</b>	
1.C.3 Ensure an equitable distribution of public parks and recreational facilities.	 	C		<b>Parks Department</b>	
1.C.4 Support implementation of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP).	  	R, P, O		<b>Office of Sustainability, Planning Department, Environmental Services</b>	









Recommendation	Value	Category	Timeframe	Responsibility	Partners
1.C.5 Improve accessibility to fresh foods throughout the community, with a focus on food deserts and economically challenged neighborhoods.	  	R, P		<b>Planning Department, Economic Development,</b> Community Development, Environmental Services, Office of Sustainability	The Right Place, Grand Rapids Chamber, West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Kent County Essential Needs Task Force / Food Policy Council
1.C.6 Continue to support community gardens and promote an edible landscape.	 	O, C		<b>Planning Department, Parks Department, Economic Development,</b> Community Development, Environmental Services	Grand Rapids Land Bank Authority
1.C.7 Expand City programs to support sustainable housing conditions.	  	P		<b>Community Development,</b> Office of Sustainability	
1.C.8 Continue to promote the use of green infrastructure on individual home sites.		P, O		<b>Environmental Services Department, Office of Sustainability,</b> Planning Department	
1.C.9 Promote native plant use in home landscapes.		P, R, O		<b>Planning Department, Environmental Services Department,</b> Office of Sustainability	

Recommendation	Value	Category	Timeframe	Responsibility	Partners
1.C.10 Continue to work towards the City's tree canopy goal.		P, O		<b>Planning Department,</b> <b>Parks Department,</b> Engineering, Office of Sustainability	<b>Friends of Grand Rapids Parks</b>
1.C.11 Support facilities that locally generate and distribute energy.		C, R, O, P		<b>Office of Sustainability,</b> <b>Environmental Services Department,</b> Engineering, Mobile GR, Planning	
1.C.12 Continue to encourage voluntary community benefits agreements.		O	M	<b>Economic Development Department</b>	



## 2 VITAL BUSINESS DISTRICTS

### 2.A SUPPORT COMPACT CENTERS THAT PROVIDE A MIX OF USES.





2.A.1 Update the zoning ordinance to encourage density in areas that serve residents and businesses.		R	S	<b>Planning Department</b>	
2.A.2 Direct dense development downtown and in areas and corridors served by regional transit routes.		O		<b>Planning Department,</b> <b>Downtown Grand Rapids Inc.,</b> <b>Economic Development,</b> Mobile GR	The Rapid
2.A.3 Support infill development at an appropriate scale.		O	S	<b>Planning Department,</b> <b>Economic Development,</b> Environmental Services	Grand Rapids Land Bank Authority



Recommendation	Value	Category	Timeframe	Responsibility	Partners
2.A.4 Support taller commercial buildings in commercial districts.		R	S	<b>Planning Department</b>	
2.A.5 Update the zoning ordinance to address the impacts of continued growth in business districts.		R, O	S	<b>Planning Department, Mobile GR</b>	

## 2.B IMPROVE THE ACCESSIBILITY OF BUSINESS DISTRICTS.

2.B.1 Require a plan to encourage people to use modes of transportation other than driving alone when large developments are proposed within nodes identified on in the Conceptual Development Framework.		R, P, O	M	<b>Planning Department, Mobile GR, Economic Development</b>	
2.B.2 Set maximum block sizes within Community Activity Centers identified on the Future Character and Land Use Map.		R	S	<b>Planning Department</b>	



## 2.C BROADEN AND ENHANCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL SERVICES, AMENITIES, AND CULTURAL ASSETS.

2.C.1 Evaluate strategies to protect significant community structures.		O	S, M	<b>Planning Department, Economic Development</b>	GRPS
2.C.2 Increase the capacity of the City's Corridor Improvement Authorities to have meaningful impact in their districts.	 	P, O	M	<b>Economic Development</b>	
2.C.3 Continue to support private sector investments in sustainable infrastructure.		O	S	<b>Economic Development, Environmental Services Department, Office of Sustainability</b>	


Recommendation	Value	Category	Timeframe	Responsibility	Partners
2.C.4 Continue to support public art championed by community organizations.		O, C, P		<b>Downtown Grand Rapids Inc., Executive Office, Parks Department,</b> Engineering, Economic Development, Planning Department	Arts and Culture Collective of Grand Rapids

### 3 A STRONG ECONOMY





#### 3.A INCREASE THE DENSITY OF HIGH-WAGE JOBS AND DECREASE THE WAGE GAP IN GRAND RAPIDS.

3.A.1 Support efforts to grow the greater Grand Rapids region into a major tech hub of the Midwest.		P	M	<b>Economic Development,</b> Downtown Grand Rapids Inc.	<b>Grand Rapids Chamber, The Right Place</b>
3.A.2 Encourage the growth of the life sciences industries in and near the Medical Mile.		O, R	M	<b>Economic Development, Planning Department</b>	MSU, Corewell, GVSU, The Right Place, Grand Rapids Chamber, West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
3.A.3 Prioritize transformational projects that will enhance the regional and national appeal of Grand Rapids.		O	L	<b>Planning Department</b>	<b>The Right Place</b>



#### 3.B ENSURE A WIDE RANGE OF RESIDENTS CAN ACCESS JOBS.

3.B.1 Identify key commercial corridors and neighborhood centers for reinvestment and future planning work.		O	S	<b>Economic Development, Planning Department,</b> Engineering	Grand Rapids Land Bank Authority
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Recommendation	Value	Category	Timeframe	Responsibility	Partners
3.B.2 Evaluate reuse of obsolete industrial for other purposes.		P	M	<b>Economic Development, Planning Department, Mobile GR</b>	
3.B.3 Reposition underutilized commercial properties to support non-retail businesses.		R	M	<b>Planning Department</b>	
3.B.4 Consider a hybrid business use category within Innovation Centers identified on the Future Character and Land Use Map.		R	S	<b>Planning Department</b>	
3.B.5 Evaluate and enhance broadband access across the city.	 	C, P		<b>Environmental Services Department, Information Technology, Engineering, Parks and Rec</b>	





### 3.C BALANCE ECONOMIC GROWTH WITH PRIORITIES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.

3.C.1 Grow more jobs within the city that are near the workforce.	 	P	S	<b>Economic Development</b>	<b>Grand Rapids Chamber, The Right Place</b>
3.C.2 Promote the green economy.		O	S	<b>Economic Development, Office of Sustainability</b>	
3.C.3 Amend the zoning ordinance to reduce the impact of industrial uses on surrounding areas.		R	S	<b>Planning Department</b>	
3.C.4 Continue brownfield remediation and redevelopment efforts.		P	S	<b>Economic Development</b>	Grand Rapids Land Bank Authority








Recommendation	Value	Category	Timeframe	Responsibility	Partners
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## 4 BALANCED MOBILITY

### 4.A DESIGN AND MAINTAIN STREETS THAT ARE SAFE FOR ALL ROAD USERS.




4.A.1	Improve intersections and corridors with the most serious and fatal traffic crashes.	 	O, C		<b>Mobile GR, Engineering</b>	GRPS, Grand Valley Metro Council
4.A.2	Address high-crash intersections and corridors through quick-build interventions.		P, C	M	<b>Mobile GR, Engineering</b>	
4.A.3	Provide citywide education and engagement about mobility projects and issues.		P	S	<b>Communications Department, Mobile GR, Engineering, Planning Department, Office of Equity and Engagement</b>	Grand Valley Metro Council, MDOT








### 4.B SUPPORT VIABLE TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS THAT ARE AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE, AND MEET COMMUNITY MEMBERS' NEEDS.

4.B.1	Make strategic investments in bicycle facilities.	 	C, O		<b>Mobile GR, Engineering</b>	
4.B.2	Support shared mobility models to increase transportation choices.	 	P		<b>Mobile GR</b>	
4.B.3	Promote electric bicycle and vehicle ownership.		R, P	S	<b>Mobile GR, Planning Department, Office of Sustainability</b>	

Recommendation	Value	Category	Timeframe	Responsibility	Partners
4.B.4 Support programs that encourage travel options other than personal vehicles.		P, O	M	<b>Mobile GR, Planning Department,</b> Office of Sustainability	GVMC
4.B.5 Support collaboration between businesses, organizations, and communities to expand commute options.		P	L	<b>Mobile GR, Planning Department,</b> Office of Sustainability	The Rapid
4.B.6 Continue to invest in transit stop amenities.	 	C	S	<b>Mobile GR</b>	The Rapid
4.B.7 Work with Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to address highways and state routes where they create barriers to safe walking, bicycling and riding transit.		C	M	<b>Mobile GR, Engineering,</b> Planning Department	MDOT, The Rapid

## 4.C COORDINATE LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION DECISIONS.

4.C.1 Reduce minimum parking requirements to support compact growth patterns.		R	S	<b>Planning Department</b>	
4.C.2 Limit the size of surface parking lots.		R	S	<b>Planning Department</b>	
4.C.3 Establish mobility hubs at neighborhood, employment, and transit-oriented nodes as shown in the Conceptual Development Framework.		C, O	M, L	<b>Mobile GR,</b> Engineering, Economic Development, Planning Department	The Rapid
4.C.4 Develop comprehensive curbside management guidelines that address loading zones, drop-off/pickup zones, on-street parking, and bicycle/scooter parking.		R, O	M	<b>Mobile GR,</b> Planning Department	

Recommendation		Value	Category	Timeframe	Responsibility	Partners
4.C.5	Consider modes of travel other than cars in the development review and approval process.		O	S	<b>Mobile GR, Planning Department</b>	
4.C.6	Ensure new developments maintain walkable and bikeable roadway networks with appropriate access to transit.	  	R	S	<b>Planning Department,</b> Mobile GR, Engineering	
4.C.7	Support implementation of the Vital Streets Plan.	  	O	S	<b>Planning Department, Engineering Department, Mobile GR</b>	





# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Affordable Housing.** There are two main kinds of affordable housing: 1.) dedicated affordable housing units that come with binding rent and/or income restrictions to ensure it is occupied by low-income households and 2.) market affordable housing units that rent or sell at an affordable price but have no binding restrictions. Market affordable housing is generally affordable to households earning between 80-120% of the area median income.

**Area Median Income.** The income level earned by a household in a designated demographic area, where half the households earn more and half earn less.

**Area Specific Plan.** These plans provide a finer grain of analysis than a city-wide Community Master Plan, and may be prepared for a block, a neighborhood, a business district or a larger area. They may be undertaken in response to a development proposal or as a proactive planning study. Area specific plans establish a specific mix of uses and building types, roadway alignments and design treatments, and necessary public facilities and amenities needed to make a neighborhood a success, standards and guidelines that ensure continuity with the valued characteristics of existing development to be retained are also provided.

**Brownfield.** Brownfields sites include properties with environmental contamination or functionally obsolete buildings. The definition is broad and can cover an entire industrial zone or a single abandoned building, a massive hazardous waste dump or spillage from a corner dry cleaning shop.

**Building Form.** The configuration or shape of a building influenced by its massing, height, proportion, and scale relative to the surrounding context.

**Building Setback.** A required separation between a lot line and/or right-of-way line and a building or structure. The building setback varies by zoning district and may include a minimum, and in some cases, a maximum distance.

**Capital Improvement Projects.** Any building or infrastructure project that will be owned by a governmental unit and purchased or built with direct appropriations from the governmental unit, or with bonds backed by its full faith and credit, or in whole or in part, with federal or other public funds, or in any combination thereof. A project may include construction, installation, project management or supervision, project planning, engineering, or design, and the purchase of land or interests in land.

**Character.** Attributes of urban form and function, including the size and type of buildings and their relationship to the street, the surrounding street and block pattern, parking and access, and land uses.

**Climate Change.** Long-term continuous increase or decrease to average weather conditions or range of weather.

**Climate Migration.** The movement of people due to climate or the effects of climate change. As disasters become more frequent and severe, and as the impacts of sea-level rise and extreme heat become more pronounced, it is increasingly likely that people will move away from more vulnerable areas.

**Community Master Plan.** A comprehensive, long-range guide for future growth and physical development in a community. A community master plan is used to examine physical development issues. State enabling act requires a valid zoning ordinance to be based on an adopted community master plan. The purpose of the plan is to promote public health, safety and general welfare as well as quality of life.

**Complete Neighborhoods.** A mix of housing types in close proximity to centers and corridors that give residents convenient access to daily needs, employment, recreation, and transportation options. Complete neighborhoods are a desired outcome of a 15-Minute City approach, which makes travel across the city a choice, not a necessity, for meeting everyday needs.

**Connectivity.** Refers to the way in which individual developments and uses are physically linked together within the larger fabric of the city. Most often, it refers to the network of streets and blocks and the way in which they encourage or discourage walkability and concentrate or distribute traffic. Other examples of connectivity include the availability and location of transit routes and stops, bike routes, and other off-street pathway.

**Development Character.** Attributes of urban form and function, including the size and type of buildings and their relationship to the street, the surrounding street and block pattern, parking and access, and land uses.

**First- and Last-Mile Connection.** The beginning or end of an individual trip made primarily by public transportation. On either end of a public transit trip, the origin or destination may be difficult or impossible to access by a short walk. The trip from a destination to public transit is called the first mile connection, and the trip from public transit to a destination is termed a last mile connection.



**Future Character and Land Use Map.** The portion of the Community Master Plan that describes planned land uses and areas for change. The descriptions illustrate what types of land uses are appropriate within a given geographic area, points for consideration, and desired outcomes for the future. The text describes the future land use map and supersedes the map in instances where clarification or interpretation is required.

**Gentrification.** Gentrification involves the influx of wealthier people into historically under-resourced neighborhoods, which can lead to the displacement of lower-income residents and businesses.

**Green Infrastructure.** A network of green space, low impact development, and nature conservation that connects to form an overall system that, through infiltration, evapotranspiration, and reuse, improves water quality and controls rainfall runoff rates on the site where it is generated.

**Infill Development.** The development of new housing or other buildings/uses on scattered vacant sites in a built-up area.

**Infrastructure.** This is a general term that includes all the structures, facilities, and services that support development, provided by the public and private sectors. Examples include roads, bike facilities (lanes, trails, racks), sidewalks, transit, stormwater facilities, water treatment and distribution, wastewater collection and treatment, parks, fire, police, emergency services, libraries, schools, and government offices.

**Land Uses.** The purpose to which a parcel of land is being used. Examples of uses include residential, commercial, industrial and recreational.

**Mixed-use/mixed-use development.** The development of a tract of land or building or structure with two or more different uses such as but not limited to residential, office, retail, civic, or entertainment, in a compact urban form.

**Multimodal.** Allowing for the use or operation of different modes of transportation including but not limited to walking, biking, personal vehicle, and public transit.

**Open space.** A parcel of land and/or water reserved for the use and enjoyment of residents, tenants, and their guests. Roofed structures may be included within open space if they are intended for the recreational or other leisure use of residents. Open space shall not include public or private street right-of-way nor any part of a building lot which is intended for the private and exclusive use of individual owners.

**Planning Team.** The Planning Team included City staff and consultants with expertise in land use, transportation, economic development, sustainability, and community engagement.

**Planning Commission.** Body of 9 members appointed by the Mayor. The Planning Commission is responsible for overseeing the physical development of the community and formal adoption of the Community Master Plan.

**Redevelopment.** Development that occurs by improving existing structures or by building where previous structures have been demolished.

**Redlining.** A discriminatory practice that consists of the systematic denial of services such as mortgages, insurance loans, and other financial services to residents of certain areas, based on their race or ethnicity.

**Residential Land Use.** A building, or parcel of land used for housing. This can include detached one family housing units, or multifamily arrangements including two units, three or more units, apartments, condos, etc.

**Right of Way.** A general term denoting public ownership or interest in land, usually in a strip which has been acquired for or devoted to the use of a street or alley.

**Tax Increment Financing (TIF).** A financing plan to support development of under utilized private properties by capturing a portion of the property tax within a district to fund improvements in the district. When a TIF is established, an existing property tax base is established and all base taxes continue to be collected and transmitted to various government units. As the district develops, the property taxes collected on the increase in tax value for the district (the “tax increment”) is transmitted to the authority and used to pay for specific improvements in the area.

**Transit.** The movement of people by public conveyance.

**Transit-Oriented Development (TOD).** A development approach that creates compact, mixed-use communities near transit where people enjoy easy access to jobs and services.

**Stakeholder.** One who is involved in or affected by a course of action.

**Steering Committee.** Citizen committee of 50 individuals appointed by the Mayor representing diverse interests to oversee the Community Master Plan process.

**Zoning.** An important tool used in shaping and forming community growth and redevelopment in a manner consistent with the Community Master Plan. It regulates various aspects of how land may be used.

**Zoning Classification.** The name given to types of zones such as single family residential, rural residential, agricultural, regional shopping, neighborhood shopping, office, industrial, etc.

**Zoning Ordinance.** A zoning ordinance consists of two parts - the district map and the written text. The text sets out the purposes, uses and district regulations for each district, the standards for special land uses and for general administration. The zoning map graphically illustrates into which the zones or districts into which all of the land within the community is classified.





# BRIDGE TO OUR FUTURE

GRAND RAPIDS  
COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN