



Public Draft

BRIDGE TO OUR FUTURE

**GRAND RAPIDS
COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN**

2024

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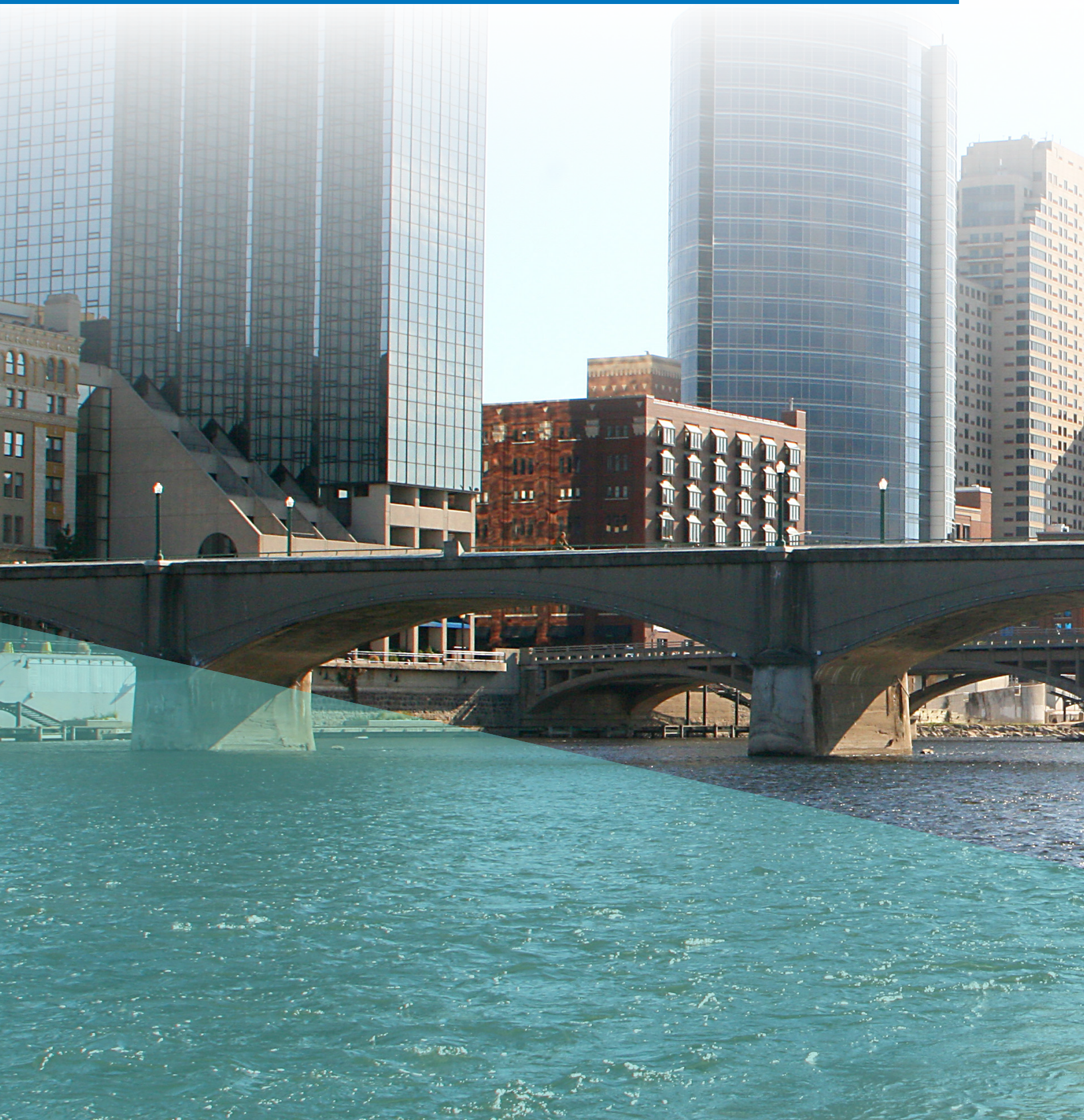
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INTRODUCTION



In fall 2022, the City of Grand Rapids launched Bridge to Our Future, a process to create a Community Master Plan. The previous master plan was adopted in 2002, with additional updates, and since then new challenges and opportunities in the city 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 evolves, 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 physical development of the community into the future, typically 20 years. A Community Master Plan addresses a range of topics such as population, economy, housing, transportation, facilities, and land use. The plan integrates technical analysis with robust public input from residents, businesses, and other community stakeholders. Although the 2002 Master Plan has been updated since it was created, it is time for a new one. The Community Master Plan serves as the foundation of the Zoning Ordinance. This relationship 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. 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 creates the legal basis for zoning.

PRE-PLANNING

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 engaged over 500 community members in over 90 meetings. Facilitators 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 development of the project scope and the planning process, as well as the formation of the Steering Committee.

STEERING COMMITTEE

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

Once the process to write the Community Master Plan began, the Steering Committee informed the planning process and the plan's content. The committee served as community advocates for the plan, assisted with community outreach, and provided guidance and direction regarding the engagement process of the plan. The Steering Committee generally met consistently throughout the process, reviewing engagement materials and feedback, providing expert community knowledge, and advocating for the community in their meetings. Members of the Steering Committee also acted as table facilitators at engagement and community events.

The Steering Committee was led by a five-person Leadership Committee, nominated by the group, of which four members were permanent and one position rotated. The Leadership Committee met with staff and consultants on a regular basis to assist in generating agendas for the Steering Committee meetings, discuss ideas around engagement of the community, and address any special circumstances that arose.



Steering Committee Meetings

TODAY'S CHALLENGES

HISTORY OF REDLINING IN GRAND RAPIDS

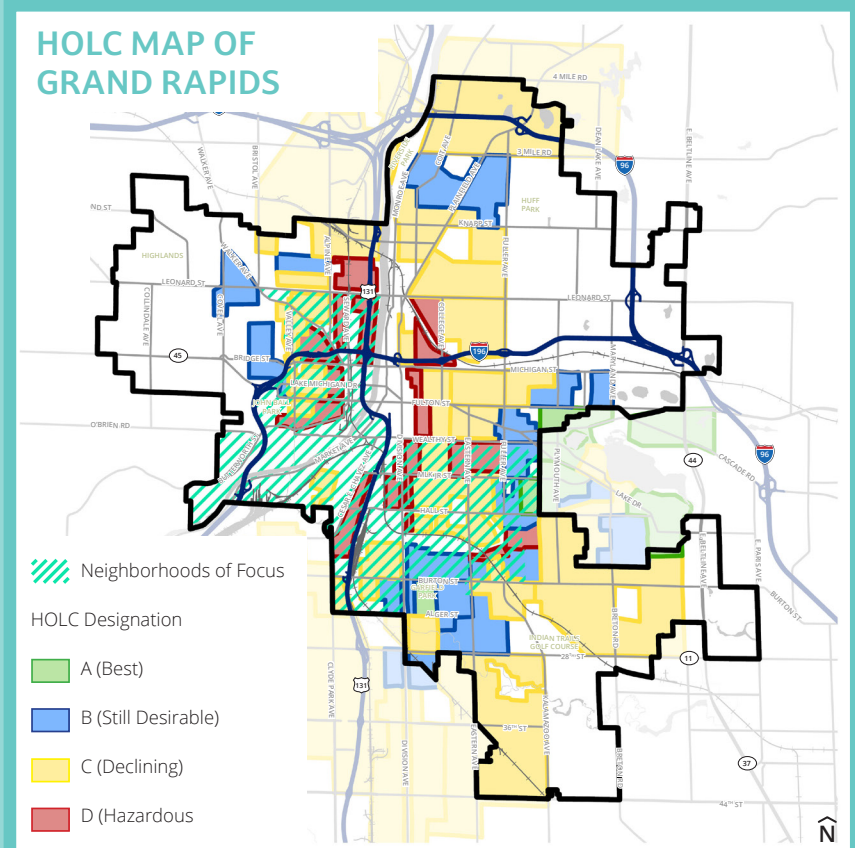
Across the United States, persistent economic and racial segregation means that children grow up in neighborhoods with vastly different opportunities and resources.

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 categories, from A to D, into which neighborhoods were rated. Within Grand Rapids, six neighborhoods received A ratings, twenty received B ratings, twenty-eight received C ratings, and seven received D ratings. Residents of neighborhoods labeled C and D, or failing neighborhoods, were primarily Black and other immigrants and ethnic groups. The government agencies and mortgage lenders believed the presence of Black and immigrant 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 redlined communities, 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 who 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 (shown on the HOLC map of Grand Rapids) 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.

Reversing the impacts of redlining is a focus of the City of Grand Rapids and the Grand Rapids Community Master Plan. 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.



CLIMATE CHANGE

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. The climate change crisis is one of the City's top concerns.

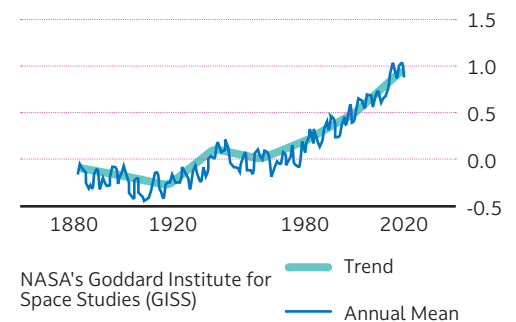
Climate change results in long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. These shifts may be natural, such as through variations in the solar cycle. But since the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, mainly due to burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas. While some years have seen hotter or colder weather, the averaging of those changes over 20 to 30 years shows that the planet is warming.

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 to still to come. Anticipated changes include increasing temperature, precipitation, and extreme weather events.

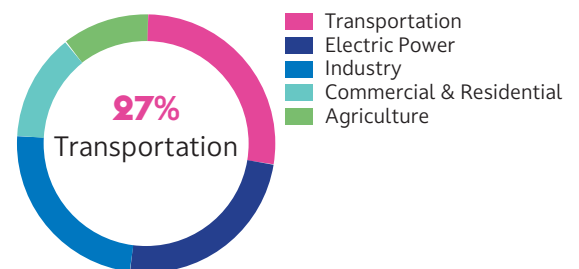
The City of Grand Rapids Office of Sustainability collaborated with the Planning Department to emphasize environmental justice and climate mitigation and adaptation in the Community Master Plan. Recommendations in the plan intentionally address:

- Affordable Housing:** Energy cost burden more often falls on low-income households due to substandard housing. Climate change will likely deepen this problem due to ongoing and projected increases in average and extreme temperatures. Increasing access to energy-efficient, affordable housing is a key climate justice solution.
- Transportation Equity:** Transportation is the number one source of carbon emissions in the United States. Transportation equity focuses on solutions that include equitable access for low-income and communities of color and move away from reliance on automotive vehicles. Solutions involve encouraging public transportation and forms of active mobility such as walking or biking.

Global Temperature Trend



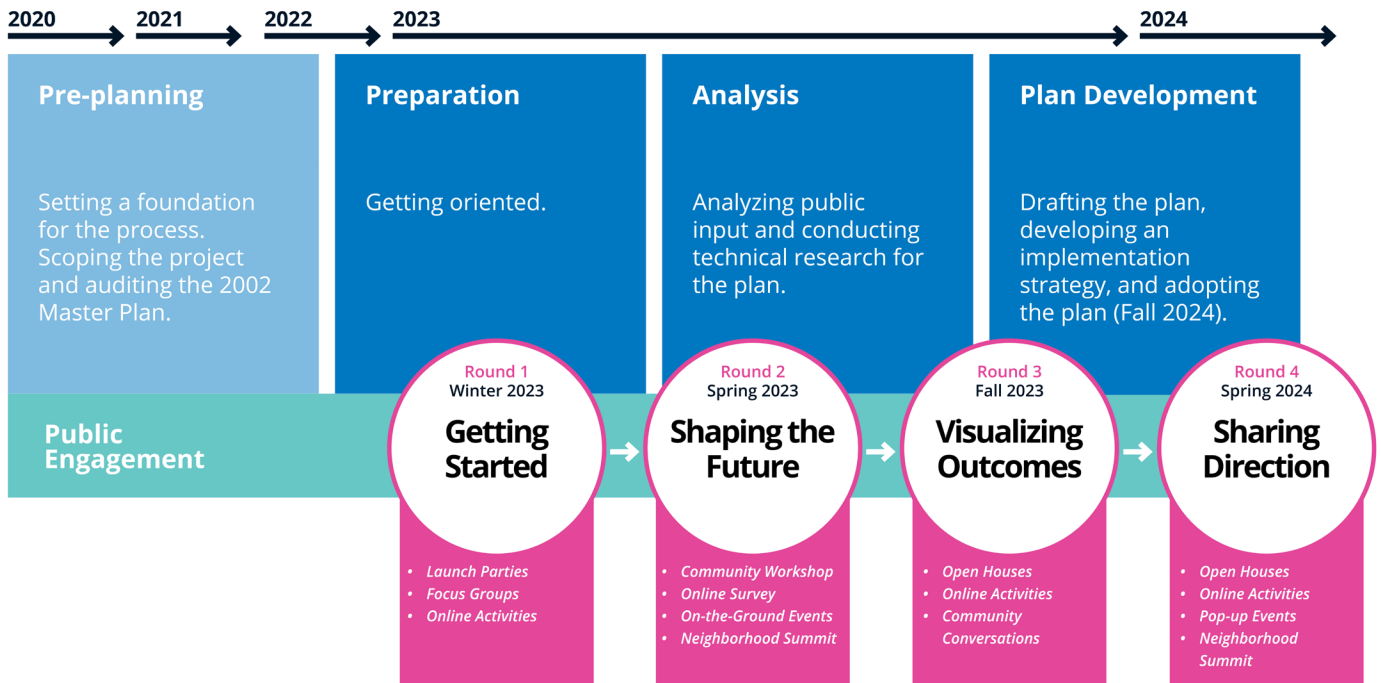
Total U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Economic Sector in 2020



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

PROCESS

The planning process was shaped by data, existing conditions, and the experiences of people who live, work, and play in Grand Rapids.



COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

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 featured baseline information about existing conditions in Grand Rapids and was used to inform the planning process. The report covered demographic conditions and trends, the built environment, housing, employment, and prosperity. This data can be found throughout the plan chapters to support the recommendations. The full community profile is contained in the appendix.

COMMUNITY CONNECTORS

Those parts of the population that have historically been overlooked through traditional engagement approaches received special focus through a diverse team of Community Connectors. A range of community members served as Community Connectors for the planning process and were compensated for their work. Community Connectors were trusted voices in the community that helped expand the reach of engagement efforts. The group was comprised of diverse 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 small group meetings, community conversations, one-on-one interviews, and more. Snacks and meals were provided during the outreach events to remove barriers to participation. Their partnership created a more direct exchange of information with residents and strengthened the relationship between City departments and the community. The Community Connectors broadened participation in the process by doing engagement activities from each of the four rounds with their networks in their neighborhoods.

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

The City of Grand Rapids has more than 30 neighborhood organizations, many of which were involved in the Community Master Plan process in a variety of ways. Some Neighborhood Organizations were represented on the Steering Committee, while others served as Community Connectors. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding allowed those organizations that did not serve as Community Connectors to host engagement meetings and community conversations in their neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Organizations did everything the Community Connectors did and more. Their efforts helped spread the word to their residents about the process and allowed the public to become more informed about the Community Master Plan.

FOCUS GROUPS

A series of focus groups were conducted supplemented the public engagement and generated more direct input on themes and topics important to the planning process. Focus groups were organized around topics such as career development, transportation, social services, housing, and more. Residents, professionals, and other experts in the topics participated in the discussions and provided critical insights.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The process included four rounds of community input opportunities that focused on engaging a diverse community. These events were intended to increase awareness of the process to promote open and transparent dialogue with a low barrier to participation. Community engagement was conducted concurrently with technical analysis on land use, economic conditions, and other topics. The engagement rounds moved from generative to responsive and each round of engagement built upon the insight gathered from the previous round.

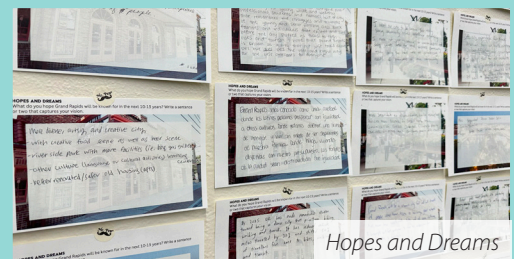
ROUND 1: WINTER 2023

The City hosted three Launch Parties, one in each ward, and an online engagement campaign to generate excitement about the process. The activities at these events gathered ideas about development and the future of the city to help inform the direction of the plan. Participants were asked to dream big and share their big ideas for the future of Grand Rapids. The events were widely promoted and open to anyone who cared about the future of Grand Rapids. 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 schools and college classes to generate input from students.

Activities

- 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



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; and
- the 15-Minute City: Land Use, Housing, Mobility.

Representatives from the planning team and the City attended the City of Grand Rapids Neighborhood Summit. They held one session on the 15-Minute City and another that combined the two 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 involved their networks through 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 students at local high schools, and attended Parks and Recreation Department Summer Camps and other area summer camps to gather input from children and teens in the city.

DEFINED PLANNING TEAM


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



Community Walk-and-Talk



Public Meeting

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



Creating Complete Neighborhoods



Creating Complete Neighborhoods



Community Walk-and-Talk

ROUND 3: FALL 2023


The third round of engagement focused on testing the goals and big ideas tested in the workshops that were developed using the insight provided by the community in the previous rounds of engagement. Three workshops were held, one in each ward, that asked participants to visualize outcomes of the plan and provide their feedback. The goal and one big idea from each chapter was presented and participants completed a corresponding activity. 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. The activities covered topics such as housing, economic development, and transportation. Each workshop opened with a special event such as a poetry performance, a community-led panel with speakers from a variety of community organizations, and national-level public speaker Shane Phillips, who addressed strategies for housing affordability and access. The Community Connectors and Neighborhood Organizations held Community Conversations in their communities, during which the display boards from the workshops were placed for review and participants held a discussion around a specific topic from the Community Master Plan. The Community Connectors and Neighborhood Organizations chose topics based on their importance to the community. Steering Committee members also held conversations to broaden the reach of the third round of engagement. City staff generated input from students and youth in the city by holding conversations in high schools and tabling at a local college event.



Public Meeting

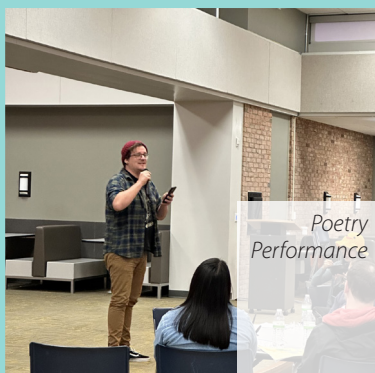


Public Meeting

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



Public Meeting



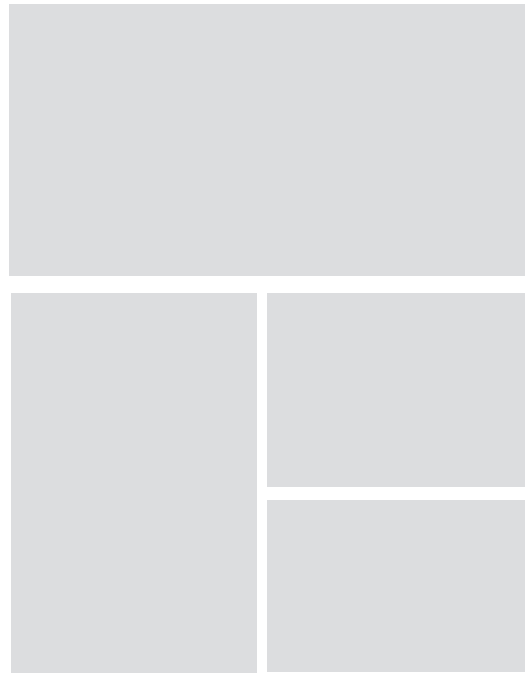
Poetry Performance



Public Meeting

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 chapters. The workshops began with an open-house-style viewing of the recommendations for each chapter of the plan. Participants reviewed the recommendations at their own pace through display boards with City staff and consultants available to answer questions. The second half of the workshop allowed participants to dive deeper into chapters of interest and the plan value threads through small group discussions, during which each small group focused on one chapter and the corresponding recommendations. The Community Connectors and Neighborhood Organizations hosted a roadshow of the display boards and hosted smaller discussions around chapter recommendations.



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. The engagement and technical analysis informed the framework of the plan. The development of the plan framework moved from the broad to the specific and each step was presented and tested with the public during the engagement rounds.

VISION STATEMENT

The Vision is an expression of the community's future.

VALUE THREADS

Values reflect, at a high level, what the community cares about.



Culture



Equity



Safety



Sustainability



Vibrancy

GOAL AREAS

Desired outcomes expressed in simple terms.

1. **Great Neighborhoods**
2. **Vital Business Districts**
3. **A Strong Economy**
4. **Balanced Mobility**
5. **Strong Development Character**

OBJECTIVES

Strategic direction that organizes the recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Projects, policies, and programs to achieve desired outcomes.



COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT






At the highest level—and therefore most general—the vision is an expression of a community’s future. It reflects the community’s values and sets the tone for more specific recommendations.

IN THE NEXT 20 YEARS,
Grand Rapids aspires to build a 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 values are threaded throughout the plan content and recommendations and noted through symbols.

The community of Grand Rapids values:

-  **Culture:** Traditions and experiences that originate from one's background and lived experiences and can be shared and celebrated with others.
-  **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.
-  **Sustainability:** Balancing growth, environmental stewardship, and well-being in a way that fulfills current and ongoing needs and opportunities of future generations.
-  **Vibrancy:** A variety of amenities, including arts, culture, and recreation opportunities, that activate and contribute to the energy of the city year-round.

COMMUNITY GOAL AREAS

The goals are desired outcomes, expressed in simple terms. These goals also serve as the organizing elements of the plan. Each goal is a chapter with supporting text, recommendations, and information.

- 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. Grand Rapids economy will offer a range of employers and job choices so that everyone can access and earn a living wage.
- 4. Balanced Mobility:** A transportation network that is safe, reliable, and affordable. Grand Rapids will have mobility options that include a variety of ways to move about the city and beyond.
- 5. Development Character:** A strong sense of place through high quality design. New development will improve or support the existing fabric of each neighborhood.

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 industrial 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 housing stock lacking in availability and diversity 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. 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 appropriately 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

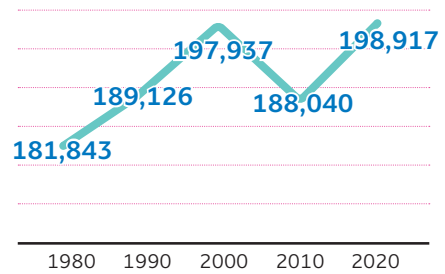
- **Grand Rapids needs more housing.** Housing scarcity and overall affordability were common themes throughout the Community Master Plan (CMP) process. During Round 1, 88% of participants identified housing as a key concern and specifically highlighted the need for more affordable housing and different types of housing. 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% AMI and 1,934 owner-occupied homes priced for households at or below 80% AMI. There is also needed housing at market rate price points to ensure that older housing can remain affordable. Without enough new market-rate options, market-rate renters and homebuyers will buy the older, more affordable housing, which can drive displacement and gentrification.
- **There is a desire for more housing options.** Residents want a vibrant and inclusive community with easy access to amenities and safe spaces for people of all backgrounds to spend time in. Participants noted the need for more missing middle housing and general support for more density, particularly along larger corridors and near jobs. They encouraged the creation of diverse and affordable housing options including apartments, townhomes, and accessory dwelling units.
- **Housing quality and maintenance vary between neighborhoods.** 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.

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 shorter 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 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.

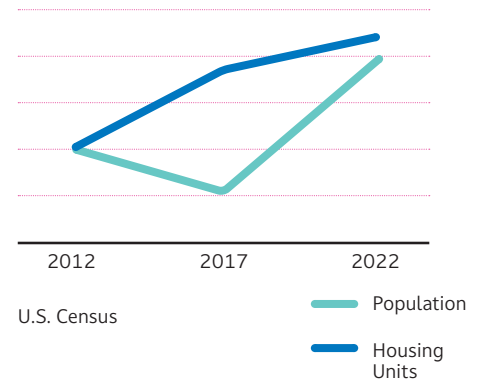


Population 1980-2020



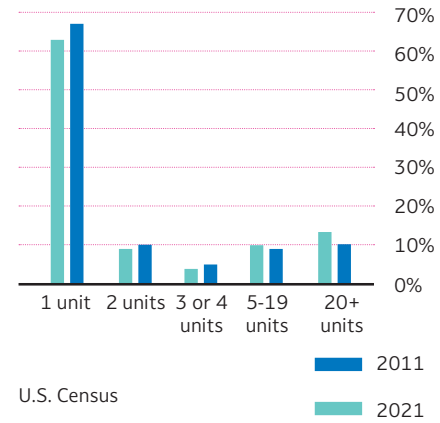
U.S. Census

Population v. Housing 2012-2022

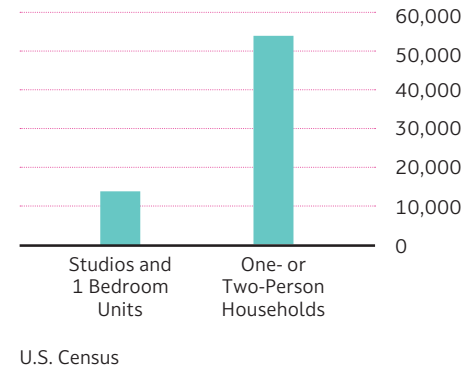


- Single-family homes are the most common type of housing in Grand Rapids.** Almost half of the land area in Grand Rapids is residential, the majority of which is single-family. In areas with a tight housing supply, like Grand Rapids, there may be opportunities to improve affordability by developing new studio or one-bedroom units. 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 move out or downsize to the smaller units. In 2022, there were 12,680 studio or 1-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.** New construction at all price points is necessary to address overall rising housing prices and provide safe and stable housing. While more dedicated affordable housing is important, high housing cost and low availability of housing can be addressed, in part, by land use policies that increase housing production and expand the types of housing that are available in more places.

New Housing by Type



Small Unit Comparison to One- and Two-Person Households



THE NEED FOR HOUSING AT 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 for many, 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 NYU Furman Center titled, "Supply Skepticism: Housing Supply and Affordability" concluded that adding new homes moderates price increases and therefore makes 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, as demand increases and prices rise for high-end housing, homeowners who would have otherwise searched for housing within that submarket may be priced out. While some may choose to stay in their current home longer or leave the city altogether, others will 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, efforts to reduce barriers to new market-rate construction can help reduce the gap between the price of available homes and what low-income households can afford to pay.



*Housing in
Grand Rapids*

OBJECTIVES

1.A CREATE COMPLETE AND STABLE NEIGHBORHOODS.

Complete neighborhoods provide a mix of housing types in close proximity to 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, multigenerational living spaces, and generally increase property value. 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 future of great neighborhoods is dependent on their ability to respond to climate change. 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.

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 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

CULTURE



EQUITY



SAFETY



SUSTAINABILITY



VIBRANCY



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 residents and 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 allowing missing middle housing types by-right 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 addition to the placement of zoning district lines between residential and non-residential districts to ease the transition.
- 1.A.4 Ensure public information about residential infill 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 Building Eye or similar platforms as a central source of public information on planning applications. Evaluate the Development with Us (DwUs) pilot program and permanently implement successes.

DEFINED

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

There are two main kinds of affordable housing: 1.) dedicated affordable housing that comes 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.

- 1.A.5 Develop an anti-displacement strategy.** Explore tools and strategies for protecting residents at risk of displacement. 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.
- 1.A.6 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.7 Provide adequate resources to meet community needs.** Ensure departments are adequately staffed to support the growing Grand Rapids community. Support the ongoing work of Code Compliance and other departments to assist historically marginalized property owners. Consider changing density and development patterns in response metrics for public services and evaluate the need for additional infrastructure, including new fire stations.

DEVELOPING AN ANTI-DISPLACEMENT STRATEGY

Rising rents or property taxes 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, 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.

Learn more about the steps to prepare a strategy and see what other communities have done to combat displacement: localhousingsolutions.org/plan/developing-an-anti-displacement-strategy/

1.A.8 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.

1.A.9 Work with the larger metropolitan community to provide safe, stable, and affordable housing options. Meeting the challenge of providing safe, stable, 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 policies that encourage housing diversity based on income and housing types. Where there are opportunities, coordinate programs to make mixed-income projects more achievable. Educate the community about the benefits of balanced, mixed-income neighborhoods with a variety of housing choices on projects where tools to promote income-diverse developments are employed.

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.

- Create explicit definitions of cooperative and co-housing in the Zoning Ordinance and incorporate as permitted multi-family uses. Make cooperative housing a Special Land Use requiring Planning Commission approval.
- Partner with the development community to identify the most impactful tools and current barriers related to delivery of middle-density housing.

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

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. Missing middle housing can help localities 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 neighborhoods.

Missing middle housing has a range of benefits for municipalities. Among other benefits, they can be used to expand the diversity and affordability of housing in neighborhoods dominated by single-family homes. In doing so, allowing middle housing can help increase the housing supply, create more affordable housing options, and create more diverse housing options for residents.

Increasing the stock of missing middle housing requires a comprehensive approach to facilitate its development. While land use regulations are an important component, there may be other barriers to constructing these housing types related to zoning regulations, approval processes, and developer capacity. 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 and could provide diverse housing options to meet the needs of different lifestyle and affordability needs. 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: missingmiddlehousing.com

Recommendation 1.B.2

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 are accessed through a shared entrance.



COTTAGE CLUSTER

A series of small, detached structures providing multiple units arranged around a shared court that is perpendicular to the street. The shared court 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 would face the street and be accessed by a private entrance.



Photos: Sightline Institute

infrastructure is provided. Consider allowing up to six units on lots fronting Link Residential and Network Residential streets 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 west of Covell Avenue, 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, working with local architects and residents (e.g., 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 increase and maintain affordability should be continued.

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

THE USE OF PUBLICLY OWNED LAND FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Even in strong markets with little undeveloped land, local governments 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 places a priority on receiving fair market value for a parcel of 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 City of Grand Rapids and Kent County 2021 Regional Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice.** 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 modifications 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 people.
- 1.C.2 Continue to enhance community assets through additional investments, including but not limited to green spaces.** This includes free, equitable, and accessible community gathering spaces and public parks, especially in disadvantaged communities. Enhance LGBTQ+ community assets through additional investments and partnerships.

AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

According to the 2020 Census, 1 in 6 people in the United States were 65 and older. 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 and Kent County 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 14.4% of Kent County residents 65 or older. Of the Grand Rapids population, 12.8% have a disability compared with 10.6% of the residents of Kent County. Ambulatory and independent living difficulties are the leading disabilities in Grand Rapids, which have a significant impact on 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. Features that make the city livable for people of all ages are in the Community Master Plan recommendations.

Recommendation 1.C.1

- 1.C.3 Ensure an equitable distribution of public parks and recreational facilities.** Support the Neighborhoods of Focus priorities of the Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan. As noted in the 2022 Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan, Ward 3 is historically deficient in municipal parks facilities and should be approached intentionally. This should include 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.
- 1.C.4 Support the Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan.** Work to create a connected network of parks, natural areas, and waterways that is accessible to all residents, with a specific focus on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. This includes creating programs and projects that ensure the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of all residents.
- 1.C.5 Improve accessibility to fresh foods throughout the community, with a focus on food deserts and economically challenged neighborhoods.** This includes facilitating 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 (e.g., by-right permitting and other streamlined approvals, off-street parking reductions) and encourage local neighborhood-based businesses that can address food desert needs. Economic incentive options should be considered based on locational factors as opportunities arise. Support the priorities of the Kent County Food Systems Assessment & Plan related to the City of Grand Rapids, which includes priorities outlined by the 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, farm stands, and edible plants. 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 improve housing conditions.** 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. Public education on the benefits of rain gardens, native plants, and vegetation for stormwater management should be expanded. Increase awareness among the general public and development community about the difference between turf lawns and native plants in terms of stormwater management and reduction of fertilizer and herbicides. Consider the creation of educational materials available on the City website and/or included with standard forms required for certain types of application submittals.
- 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 all 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, etc.).
- 1.C.10 Continue to work towards the City’s 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 priorities.
- 1.C.11 Support facilities that locally generate energy.** Support a distributed model for renewable energy production and distribution. Address the needs for and inclusion of on-site solar and wind production, 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, particularly those receiving funding from public sources, as part of economic development projects (e.g., Boston Square) 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 that can support communities with resources, time, and/or expertise.



2. VITAL BUSINESS DISTRICTS



BRIDGE TO OUR FUTURE

Business districts serve many vital roles. They are critical components of complete neighborhoods, where residents can find most of what they need locally in terms of goods and services. They generate local growth and opportunities, vibrant neighborhoods, stronger communities, and more viable local businesses. In many cases, these locations 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. Growth in these areas should not only mean an opportunity to attract new businesses and investment but support the identity of these places for years to come. 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.
- **There is support for reduced parking in business districts.** Walkable neighborhoods are often associated with increased economic activity, improved public health, and a stronger sense of community. Less emphasis on parking allows for the creation of more pedestrian-friendly environments. By minimizing parking requirements, cities can encourage higher-density developments, and reduce surface parking. This leads to more efficient land use, fosters vibrant urban spaces, and supports economic growth in a smaller footprint. By removing stringent parking requirements, smaller businesses that may not be able to afford extensive parking facilities can establish themselves in urban areas.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

- **Density is a significant driver of the local economy.** More compact developments produce higher revenues for cities than other patterns. This is especially true when each parcel's revenue is compared to the associated infrastructure or amount of parking provided. Low value per acres often correlates to underutilization of land since this measure is assessed by dividing the assessed value of a property by the total amount of its uses. Grand Rapids has several corridors characterized by large lot sites and multiple owners. While it is not necessary to maximize value-per-acre with each development or site, developments with a strong financial impact help to support developments that have a strong community value but lower revenue generation. For example,

places like Downtown, the Medical Mile, and neighborhood nodes create more taxable value per acre than commercial corridors like 28th Street. As a result, there are opportunities to develop more efficiently and create more dense commercial areas citywide to strengthen local land value.

- **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. Small businesses are defined by the Census Bureau as having fewer than 500 employees. Nearly 40% of Grand Rapids residents are either in management occupations or work in production or logistics occupations, while health care and social assistance and manufacturing remain the two largest employment sectors by industry.

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, or other public gathering places. The Community Master Plan supports a range of business districts across the city to enhance local, equitable access to services and expand housing opportunities.

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, that celebrate and promote neighborhood assets, give new and long-time residents more vibrant places to work, shop, play, learn, and do business.

DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

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.

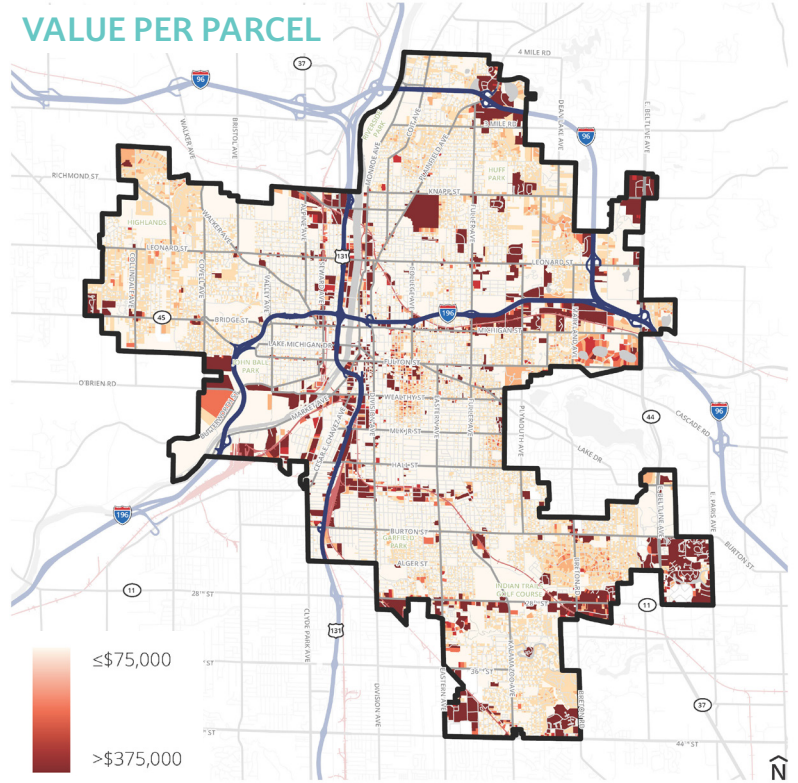


Urban Development Pattern.

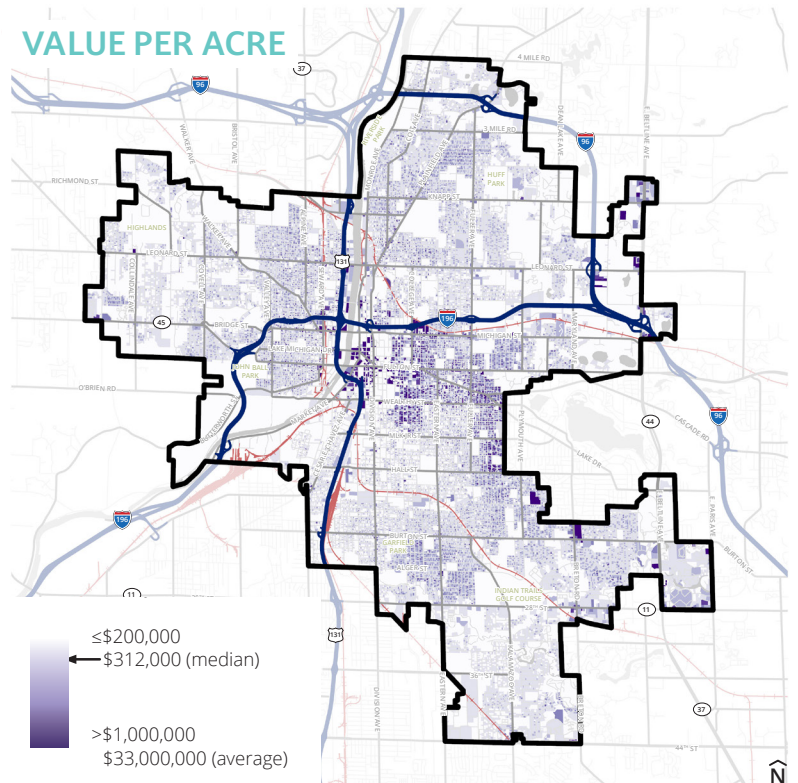
Narrow lots with alleys, buildings that are close to the street, and parking that is hidden behind the building work together to create a high-value development pattern that supports walkability.



VALUE PER PARCEL



VALUE PER ACRE



VALUE THREADS

CULTURE



EQUITY



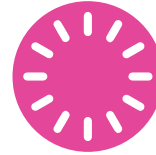
SAFETY



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, access to goods, services, dining, entertainment, and residential options. Continue to zone centers to provide a broad range of services and higher-density housing to support a critical mass of 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 new downtown population goal. Increased density, particularly concentrated downtown and along major corridors, can set the stage for future transit improvements such as light rail. Coordinate land use with broader regional transit efforts to ensure that enough land is available to accommodate projected growth. Consider setting minimum Floor Area Ratio (FAR), residential densities, and/or number of stories on sites within a certain distance of regional 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. Large-scale infill developments will generate economic vitality and sustainability, provide additional housing options for current and future residents, and provide environmental impacts (e.g., increase green space, support food access, support transit and walkability, increase the efficient use of land, and provide certain public service efficiencies). Lower-scale mixed-use and multi-family, development should be compatible with the surrounding character. Such developments 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 two-story commercial buildings in commercial districts. An amendment to the zoning code should be explored to consider raising the maximum height of commercial buildings in the MCN and MON neighborhood classifications and NOS 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 on business districts. Businesses often seek active locations with nearby amenities for their workforce, such as housing, dining options, retail stores, and service providers like dry cleaners and childcare. A growing population and changing economy necessitate flexibility to respond quickly to changing conditions and demands, allow for experimentation, and support affordability. 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,
- amenity requirements (e.g., bike rooms, locker rooms, showers, electric vehicle charging station, or package lockers) for developments over a certain size, and
- 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 Set maximum block sizes within Activity Centers identified on the Future Character and Land Use Map.** Consider additional requirements for walkways, landscaping, and plazas on sites over a certain size in Activity Centers. These incremental changes to auto-dominated areas can help improve bicycle and pedestrian circulation and access to available transit.
- 2.B.2 Require a plan to encourage people to use modes of transportation other than driving alone when large developments are proposed within Activity Centers identified on the Future Character and Land Use Map.** 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 requirements for new development or alterations to buildings over a unit count threshold to provide a TDM plan. Provide a standard agreement in lieu of a custom plan to account for small and local developers with limited resources.

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. A delay ordinance could be considered and applied by use, zoning district, year built, or additional thresholds. These policies require public notification and time for community groups to organize alternatives.

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.

Streets with large parcels and many property owners do not develop all at once. Changing an auto-dominated corridor takes time and coordination – infrastructure improvements, land use policies, and sustainable financial support are all important elements for success. The zoning model 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 for use as the development pattern gets denser. Further, capital improvement programs that upgrade infrastructure for large sections of the corridor can help prevent islands of urbanism as the corridor develops.

Example: Columbia Pike in Arlington County, Virginia stretched more than three miles, lined with fast-food restaurants, 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 that were designed to kick-start development along Columbia Pike. 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, “bike boulevards” on adjacent streets, bike racks, and six bikeshare stations.

BEFORE

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



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.



Photos: Urban Land Institute



Photos: Arlington County

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. Common TDM tools include subsidized transit passes; bike 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 transportation options survey to their residents.
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.

These TDM Plans are meant to prevent, reduce, and mitigate the impacts of the new development on the transportation system, neighborhood livability, safety, and the environment while providing safe and efficient mobility options.

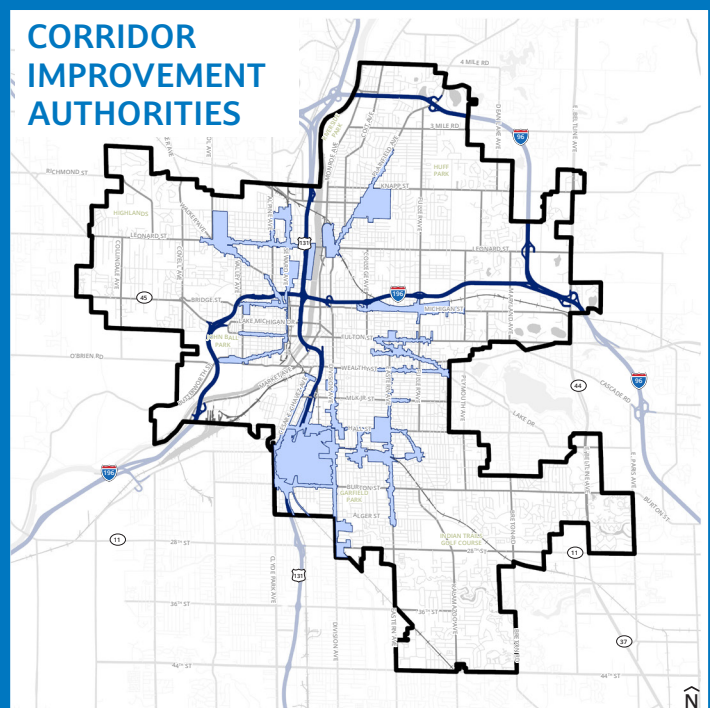
- 2.C.2 Increase the capacity of the City's Corridor Improvement Authorities to have meaningful impact in their districts.** A CIA uses tax increment financing (TIF) dollars to make capital improvements within established commercial districts and can be a powerful tool to empower the community's voice 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 green infrastructure.** Support efforts to create a City program that recognizes private entities that incorporate green roofs and other green practices into their buildings and developments. 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 in activity centers, residential neighborhoods, parks, and other public spaces.

CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT AUTHORITIES

The purpose of the Corridor Improvement Authority Act (Public Act 208 of 2005) is to help communities plan for and fund improvements along a corridor. The overall goal is to help support economic development and redevelopment of this 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.

A corridor, as defined as a development area, must comply with criteria regarding amount of commercial space, location along a major road, and zoning for mixed-use and high-density residential. The municipality must also agree to expedite the local permitting and inspection process in the development area and to modify its master plan to provide for walkable nonmotorized connections, including sidewalks and streetscapes throughout the area.

CIAs can play a role in the long-term development of auto-dominated corridors by providing the leadership, funding mechanisms, and area-specific policies that push incremental development forward.



Recommendation 2.C.2

3. A STRONG ECONOMY



Grand Rapids is the economic hub of West Michigan and manufacturing remains the heart of the local economy. Grand Rapids (or the Grand Rapids 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.

However, according to the Grand Rapids Equitable Economic Development and Mobility Strategic Plan, 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 equitable growth set in that plan.

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 to the lifestyle needs and desires of the workforce.

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 can access and earn a living wage.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

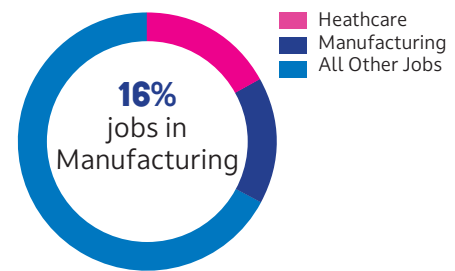
PUBLIC INPUT

- **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. Given that over 93,000 people commute to the city for work, this indicates that there is a misalignment between where people live and work, in all directions.
- **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. However, important concerns were raised about environmental impacts, noise, and potential interference with residential areas. There was general support for cleaner industries and accessible public transportation options to employment centers.

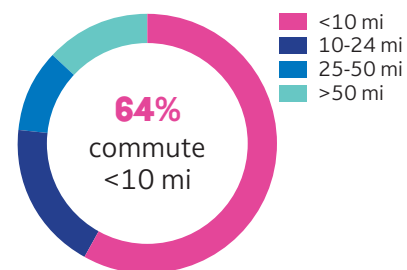
COMMUNITY PROFILE

- **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.

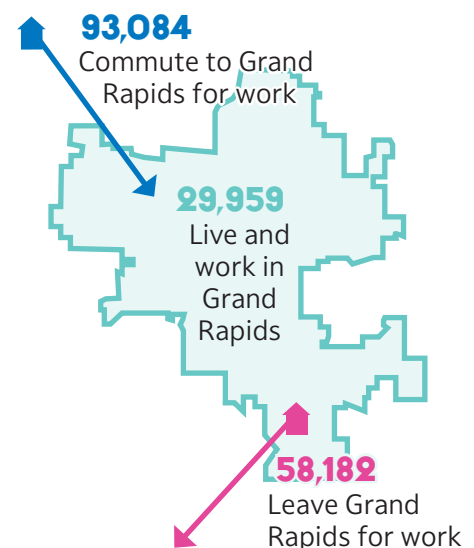
Major Employment Sectors



Average Commute Times

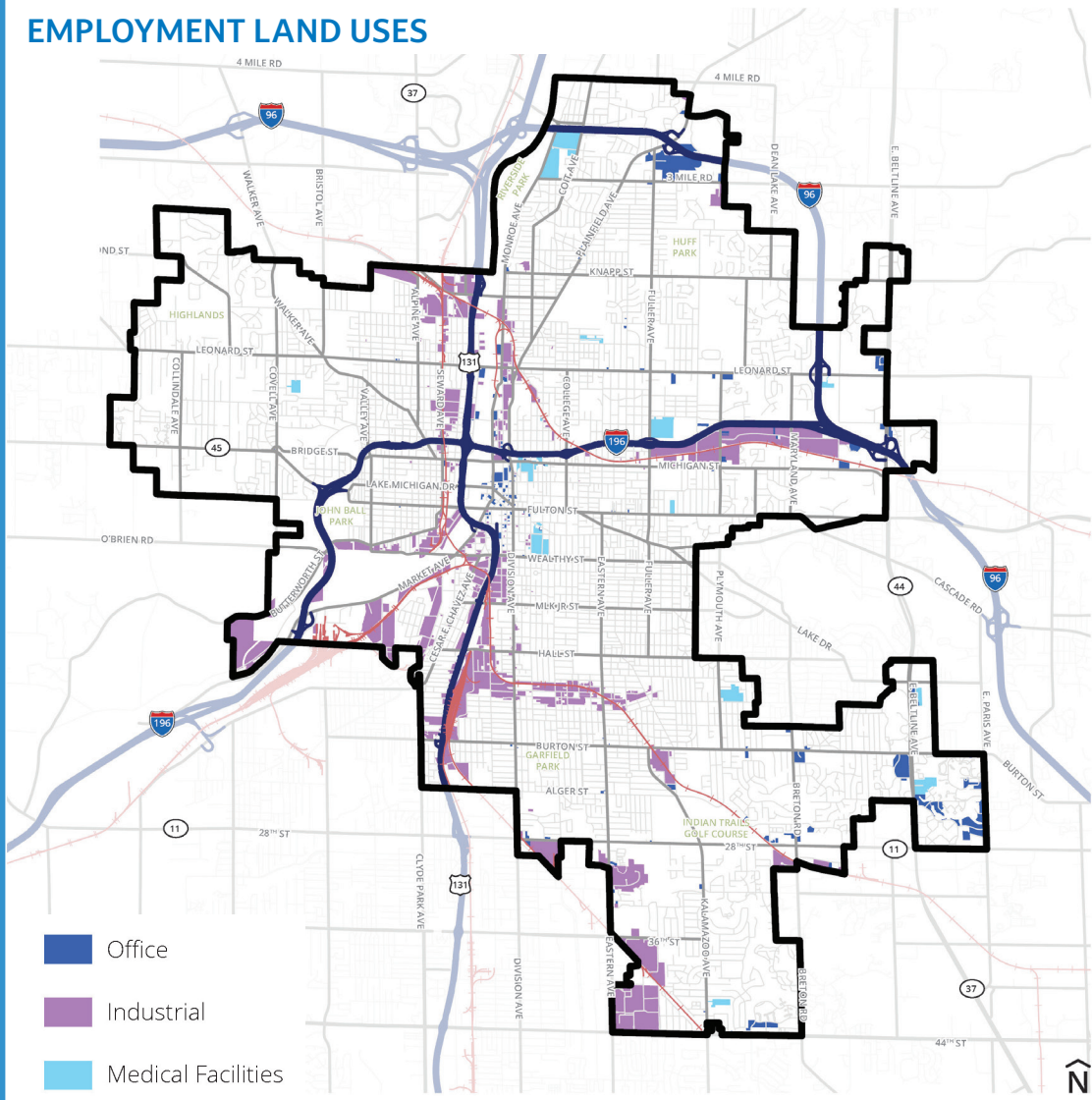


Employment Inflow/Outflow



- **Hourly wages have not kept pace with the cost of necessities.** 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.). The 2024 ALICE threshold for a family of four with two school-age children in Grand Rapids is \$58,440. This is due in part to the gap between the living wage and the minimum wage. Living wage is the hourly rate that an individual must earn to support themselves and their family (working full-time), a rate higher than the state-controlled minimum wage. Another factor is that Grand Rapids has a lot of lower-wage jobs. 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 be job clusters and include sites that house manufacturing or other production, along with warehouses and logistics functions. The range of buildings can include everything from large-scale distribution centers with significant truck access to automotive suppliers to high-tech companies. 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. These small-scale manufacturers produce little to no vibration, noise, fumes, or other nuisances, meaning they can fit within a wide variety of industrial and commercial districts. With limited industrial land and an excess of commercially zoned land, there is a need to align land supply with the evolving market of industrial uses.

EMPLOYMENT LAND USES



INDUSTRIAL LAND

Industrial is integrated along key corridors and covers six percent (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 offer unique opportunities for future redevelopment. With limited land availability, 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 necessities. Therefore, citywide prosperity will depend on smart approaches to commercial 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 wide range of residents. There is strong evidence of the rising importance of walkable, self-contained urban environments in supporting office-based employment uses, particularly for talent-driven firms. 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 work-force. 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



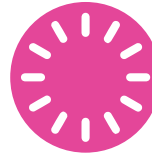
SAFETY



SUSTAINABILITY



VIBRANCY



RECOMMENDATIONS

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

3.A.1 Consider a hybrid business use category within Innovation Districts 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. Consider restructuring and refining 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.A.2 Support efforts to grow the greater Grand Rapids region into a major tech hub of the Midwest.

Capitalize on the momentum of the growing technology sector and support City efforts to align training of the local workforce with the labor market. Specifically, facilitate efforts to create redevelopment-ready sites for new renewable energy industries to locate or relocate to Grand Rapids. Review the Zoning Ordinance regularly for regulatory barriers to and needs of emerging industries.

3.A.3 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 commercial lab development may become feasible. Evidence from several key life science clusters suggests that proximity is an important location determinant as it facilitates movement between clinical, academic, and research roles of many staff. 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 prioritize life science uses on parcels conducive to large building footprints.

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. 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, a microbrewery or winery, or veterinary clinic. This flexibility may lead to more vacant buildings being occupied and more tax revenue 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.

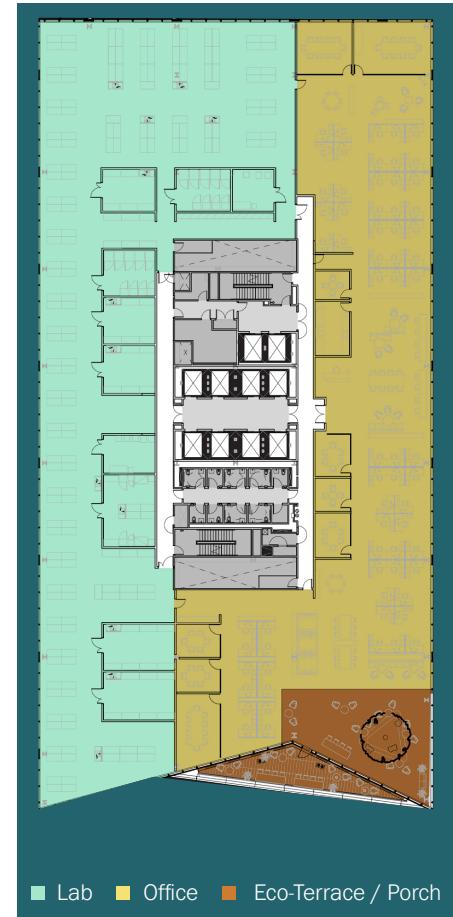
THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF LIFE SCIENCE DEVELOPMENT

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.

However, there are design challenges unique to life science buildings, such as large floorplates, higher floor-to-floor 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 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.



- LARGE, FLEXIBLE 39K RSF FLOORPLATES
- 33' WIDE COLUMN BAY SPACING
- 15 FOOT FLOOR-TO-CEILING HEIGHTS
- EMERGENCY POWER GENERATION
- 60/40 LAB TO OFFICE RATIO DAY ONE
- EXTRA FLOOR LOADING CAPACITY



Photos: Schuylkill Yards

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.** Analysis in the Community Profile determined that there are significant income density differences across the city, due in part to a history of disinvestment, such as the discriminatory practice of redlining. These differences have implications for the ability of certain areas to support robust commercial corridors. An assessment should be done to include the age of existing building stock; residential and commercial ownership patterns; rate of underutilization of parcels; determination of market area including key consumer demographics; and consumer desires, interests, and lifestyle choices to help guide equitable policy. This may include prioritizing updates to Area Specific Plans in areas experiencing significant growth and change or those with limited outside investment. 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 Grow more jobs within the city that are near the workforce.** A balance is needed between environmental justice issues as well as economic equity issues, such as having jobs in the city that are accessible to people with a range of skill sets (education and training), neighborhoods (transit), and at different points in their careers. Coordinate with other City departments to maintain data on job production, sectors, and locations. Utilize this information in review of large-scale projects.
- 3.B.3 Evaluate reuse of obsolete industrial 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 or medical 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 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. Include 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).

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 existing building footprints, should all be considered in the incremental development of these areas.

Example: In Raleigh, North Carolina, a shopping center that used to include a Kroger grocery store became the Midtown BioCenter, with 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 much further in the region's suburbs. This type of 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

- 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.

3.B.4 Reposition underutilized commercial properties to support non-retail businesses. There are potential commercial and retail sites that might be better suited to a broader employment land scenario, including research and development and light manufacturing that doesn't impact nearby residential uses (e.g., 28th Street). Large buildings offering lab space near the Medical Mile is an example depending upon lot size or the accumulation of available vacant or underutilized land.

3.B.5 Evaluate, monitor, 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 building or improving roads, utility infrastructure, energy distribution channels, sidewalk repair, etc. Monitor and track progress of broadband infrastructure build-out, and work with the local broadband service provider to assess service area gaps.

C. BALANCE ECONOMIC GROWTH WITH PRIORITIES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.

3.C.1 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., Green Spot Program, City of Columbus, Ohio, recognizes local businesses and households that fulfill certain commitments that support the local green economy).

- 3.C.2 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. Support efforts to restrict pollutants associated with industrial uses at the state level and review and update relevant City ordinances that address noise impacts. Consider requiring all developments containing industrial uses to provide an Environmental Impact Assessment with applications reviewed by the Planning Commission.
- 3.C.3 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. Grand Rapids does not have room for new major streets and roadways, and it is not always feasible nor desirable to widen existing streets. 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, and The Rapid's Transit Master 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 bicyclist's safety. Many people expressed the desire to use bicycles for daily trips but feel deterred by current road 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

- **Almost half of all serious injuries and fatalities resulting from traffic crashes occur in areas of higher need.** Between 2018 and 2022, 58 people were killed and 563 people were seriously injured in traffic crashes in Grand Rapids (Michigan State Police, 2022). According to the Vital Streets Framework equity evaluation, areas with higher need (areas with higher demographic need and connection opportunities) makeup ten percent of the city, but nearly half of the traffic crashes resulting in serious injury or death occurred in these areas.
- **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.
- **Most of the Grand Rapids workforce commutes by car.** Only 5% of Grand Rapids residents walk or bicycle to work, 3% take public transit, and 9% carpool (American Community Survey, 2022). At the same time, 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.

OBJECTIVES

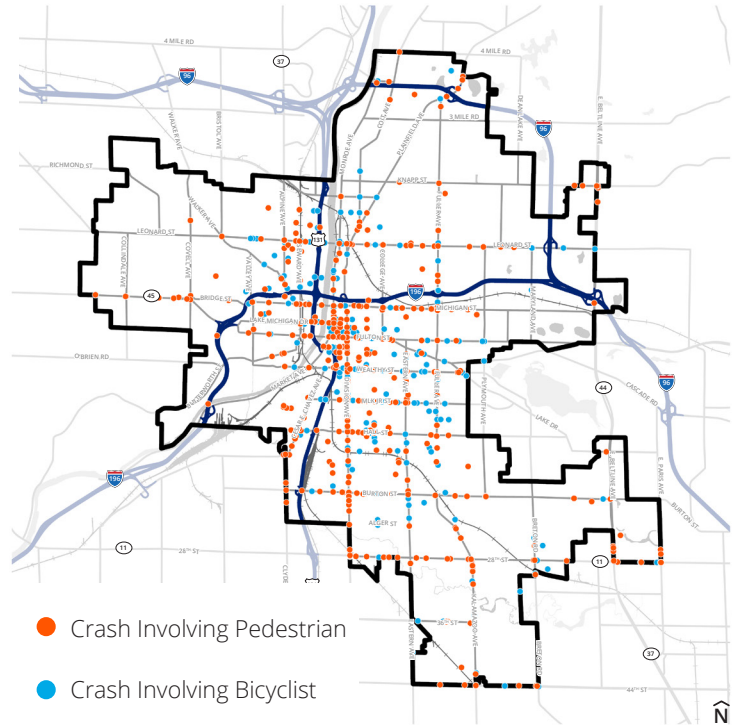
4.A DESIGN AND MAINTAIN STREETS THAT ARE SAFE FOR ALL ROAD USERS.

Fatal or disastrous traffic crashes are preventable, and by acting on street design, maintenance and operations, policy, education, and enforcement, Grand Rapids can create and maintain a network of streets that are safe for everyone. Grand Rapids has the opportunity to leverage new funding programs (e.g., the United States Department of Transportation’s Safe Streets and Roads for All program), new priorities at the federal and state levels (e.g., the National Roadway Safety Strategy and Michigan Department of Transportation’s goal to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries), and new policy and design tools that are proving effective in peer cities to accelerate its response to roadway safety.

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

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, and residents to champion new multimodal infrastructure and policies aimed at keeping 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.

BIKE AND PEDESTRIAN CRASHES



4.C COORDINATE LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION DECISIONS.

Land use and transportation impacts 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.

VALUE THREADS

CULTURE



EQUITY



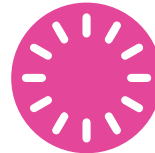
SAFETY



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 decisions about where resources are invested. 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.

- Routinely review serious injury and fatal crashes and trends. Institutionalize a crash review committee to assess safety hazards and dangerous driving behaviors. 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 existing City staff and materials. The quick-build installations, as determined by City staff, should be upgraded to permanent features over time through routine roadway and development projects.

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

- Educate residents about dangerous driving behaviors, as well as mobility infrastructure, projects, and policies.
- Partner with community organizations to provide education and engagement about safety improvements, mobility projects, 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 bike facilities. The Bicycle Action Plan lays out a vision for a complete bicycle network throughout the City of Grand Rapids. While progress continues to be made to build bikeways, concentrate investment in developing a well-connected citywide network of bike facilities, implementing by area rather than corridor. Bike facilities should be designed for people of all ages and abilities to comfortably ride which may necessitate physically protected bike facilities on streets with higher speeds and more cars. To ensure investments benefit everyone in Grand Rapids, maintain the Vital Streets Framework equity evaluation to serve as a framework for project prioritization and track projects by areas of higher need. Coordinate plans and investments with community leaders and nonprofits to ensure changes to the streetscape meet the needs of a variety of residents, employees, and business owners, among others.

SAFETY TOOLKIT

PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

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 short-term, curb extensions can be installed using paint, bollards, and/or planters.



TRANSIT

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.



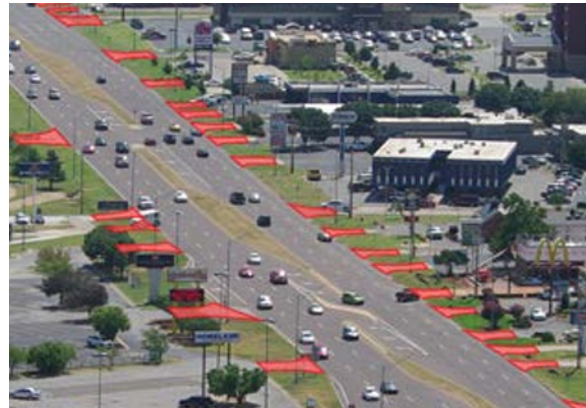
BIKE

Quick-build protected intersections separate people biking from motor vehicle traffic by setting back the bikeway 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.



WALKABILITY

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



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

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 housing types, 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.

4.B.4 Support programs that encourage travel options other than personal vehicles. 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. Consistent with the Equitable Economic Development & Mobility Strategic Plan, identify a team or department to lead TDM efforts

BEST PRACTICES FOR ELECTRIC VEHICLES POLICY

The Great Plains Institute published the “Summary of Best Practices in Electric Vehicle Ordinances: in June 2019. The ordinance guide was developed based upon funding from the Alliance for Sustainable Energy, LLC, Managing and Operating Contractor for the National Renewable Energy Laboratory for the US Department of Energy.

This summary is provided as a reference to cities seeking to develop EV zoning standards or development regulations. The examples show the breadth of choices made by communities across the nation to integrate EVSE into development regulation. The inventory of adopted ordinances includes Auburn Hills, Michigan, which can serve as a state-specific model for Grand Rapids.

Recommendation 4.B.3

for Grand Rapids and work with major employers to develop TDM programs to discourage commuting by single-occupancy vehicles. 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 disincentivizing employer-provided free parking, indoor and outdoor bicycle parking requirements, and siting guidelines that emphasize multimodal access.
- Develop programs to support employees who carpool, walk, bicycle, or use transit to access jobs, such as providing adequate facilities like bike storage, showers, and changing rooms, implementing carpool rewards programs, and fostering a culture of sustainability.
- Provide resources on the City's website that can serve as a clearinghouse of elements of a TDM program, common strategies and tools, and TDM best practices and direct employers to resources and templates for establishing their own 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 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 driver 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 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, barriers to safe walking, bicycling and transit access.** 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 with improved infrastructure and streetscape interventions such as sidewalks, 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 targeted infill development, especially when located on a transit route or a designated pedestrian-scale corridor. Allow by-right reduction in parking where waivers are met and expand waiver to encompass more development situations. 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. Paved parking areas can 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.
- 4.C.2 Limit the size of surface parking lots.** Minimize the impact of surface parking lots downtown and in business districts by setting maximum sizes on modified lots. This could be regulated by impervious areas 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 key nodes of activity including neighborhood nodes, employment centers, and transit-oriented destinations.** Mobility hubs should bring together a variety of mobility options in close proximity and be designed to enable easy connections between modes. This can include transit amenities, bicycle share, carshare, and electric charging stations. Pursue interdepartmental and stakeholder partnerships to identify ways to build on mobility hubs, such as co-locating near or providing information about social services.

Recommendation 4.C.1

PARKING REFORM

Most cities, towns, and counties establish in their zoning code a minimum number of off-street parking spaces that must be created for use in a 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.

Parking requirements can also make development projects more expensive, particularly when land prices are very high or where expensive underground parking or parking structures are needed to fit the required number of spaces. By eliminating parking requirements, cities can 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 mandates that require parking spaces for new buildings and new businesses in existing buildings. The reforms — along with complementary policies that manage street parking — help to reduce car dependency, create public and green spaces, and lower housing costs. These actions recognize that parking lots are opportunities for growth.

In the photos to the right, the zoning code required 35 parking spaces for a restaurant in this building in Fayetteville, Arkansas. It sat vacant for 40 years. Then the parking requirement was eliminated, making it more feasible for a business to open in that space.

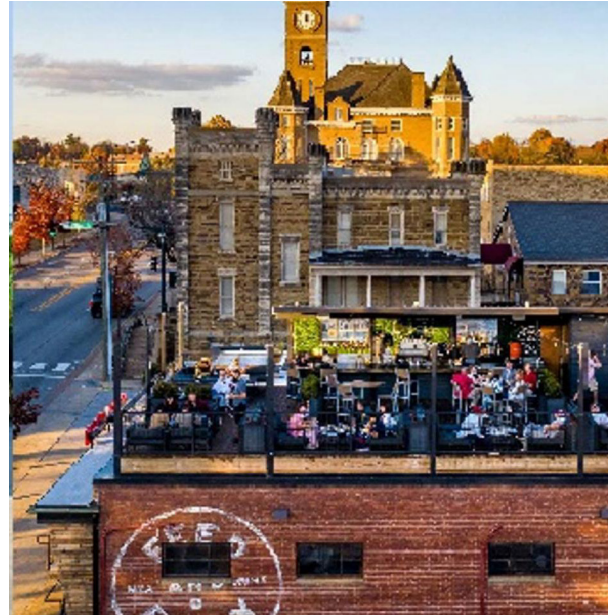


Photo: Feed and Folly

- 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 context-sensitive curb use priorities framework and comprehensive guide to curbside management in coordination with other City departments. The guidelines should:
- Provide direction to practitioners on which activities (e.g., safety, access, loading, mobility, storage, place making) to prioritize based on street typologies (as established in the Vital Streets Plan).
 - Develop a framework detailing action steps such as the placement and design of loading zones, pick-up/drop-off zones, on-street parking, EV charging, bus bulbs, in-street, or sidewalk-level bicycle facilities, parklets, and bicycle and scooter parking.
- 4.C.5 Consider modes of travel other than cars in the development review and approval process.** 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 and development review processes.
- 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 trips 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. Consider adding language to the zoning code to encourage shorter block lengths, in addition to the maximums noted, and guidelines or targets for connectivity to ensure walkable and bikeable neighborhoods.
- 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, as determined by City staff. Continue to evaluate street typologies and recommend changes to the Vital Streets Plan as development progresses under CMP.

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 and substantially influences the CMP's other topics, particularly transportation, housing, and economic prosperity.

DESIRABLE DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

GOAL

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

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

KEY TAKEAWAYS

PUBLIC INPUT

- **There is support for integrating more housing types.** Round 3 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 3 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 are opportunities to refine the approach to employment land.** Strategies that catalyze more regionally driven innovation districts framed by anchor institutions and high-wage, high-growth industries that attract talent, create density, and draw in capital to create further investment and growth (i.e. the Medical Mile).
- **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 well as exterior materials of a building as being important to the character of development in their neighborhood. However, residents are open to unique architectural designs that allow for creativity and innovation. Quality was highlighted 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. Aligning regulations with neighborhood types reinforces the importance of building strong communities with access to essential services.
- **Industrial land is currently integrated along key corridors.** Industrial land today covers six percent (1,750 acres), primarily located along the river and major roadways. These areas offer unique opportunities for future redevelopment. With limited land availability, relocating industrial uses within the city would require careful consideration.
- **Grand Rapids has a number of brownfield sites.** Brownfield sites are former industrial or commercial sites where future use is affected by real or perceived environmental contamination. This inventory includes identified sites monitored by the EPA, many of which have received funding for remediation or redevelopment. A majority are located near downtown or along the Grand River. These may present unique environmental factors for redevelopment.



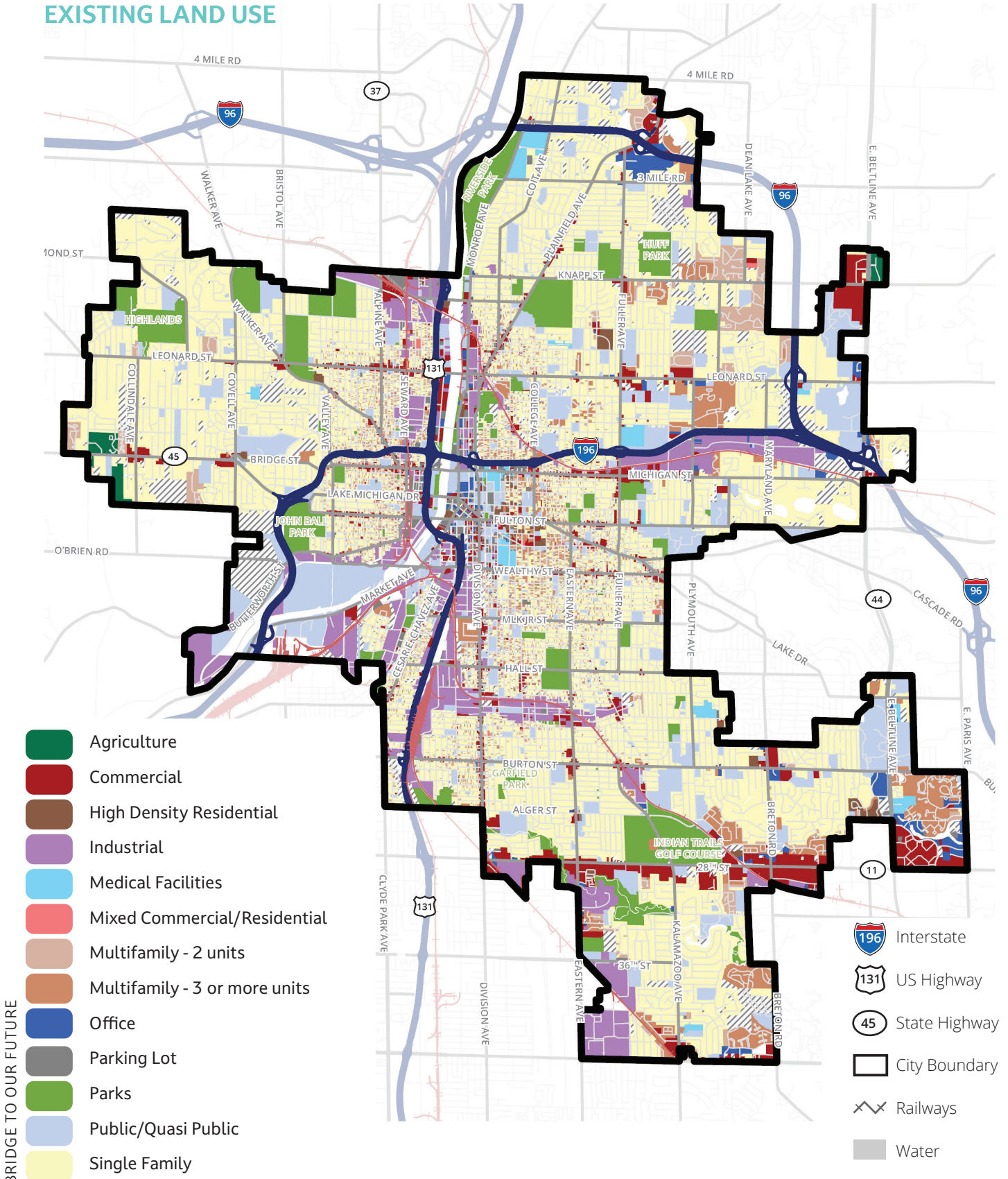
DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

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 reflect a variety of themes that are mutually reinforcing, including the quality, appearance, pattern, character, and organization of development. These principles are supported by the Future Character Map, which depicts the locations where certain concepts apply through character types.

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.
10. Maintain the City's financial health through efficient use of infrastructure, strengthening employment centers, and expanding development incentives.

EXISTING LAND USE

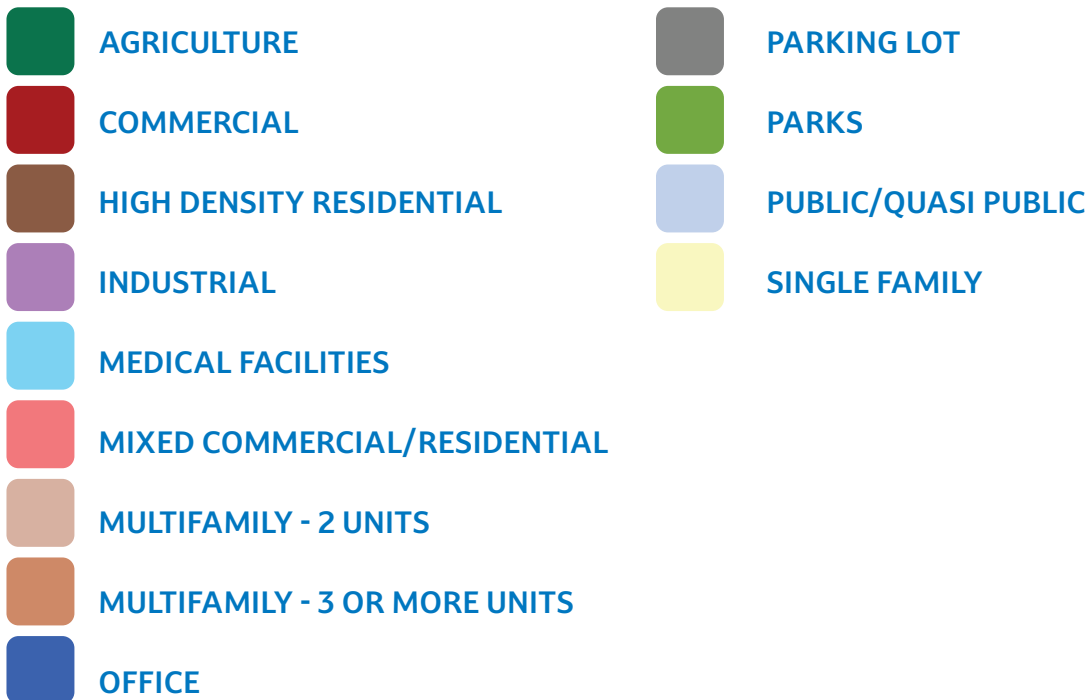


EXISTING LAND USE MAP

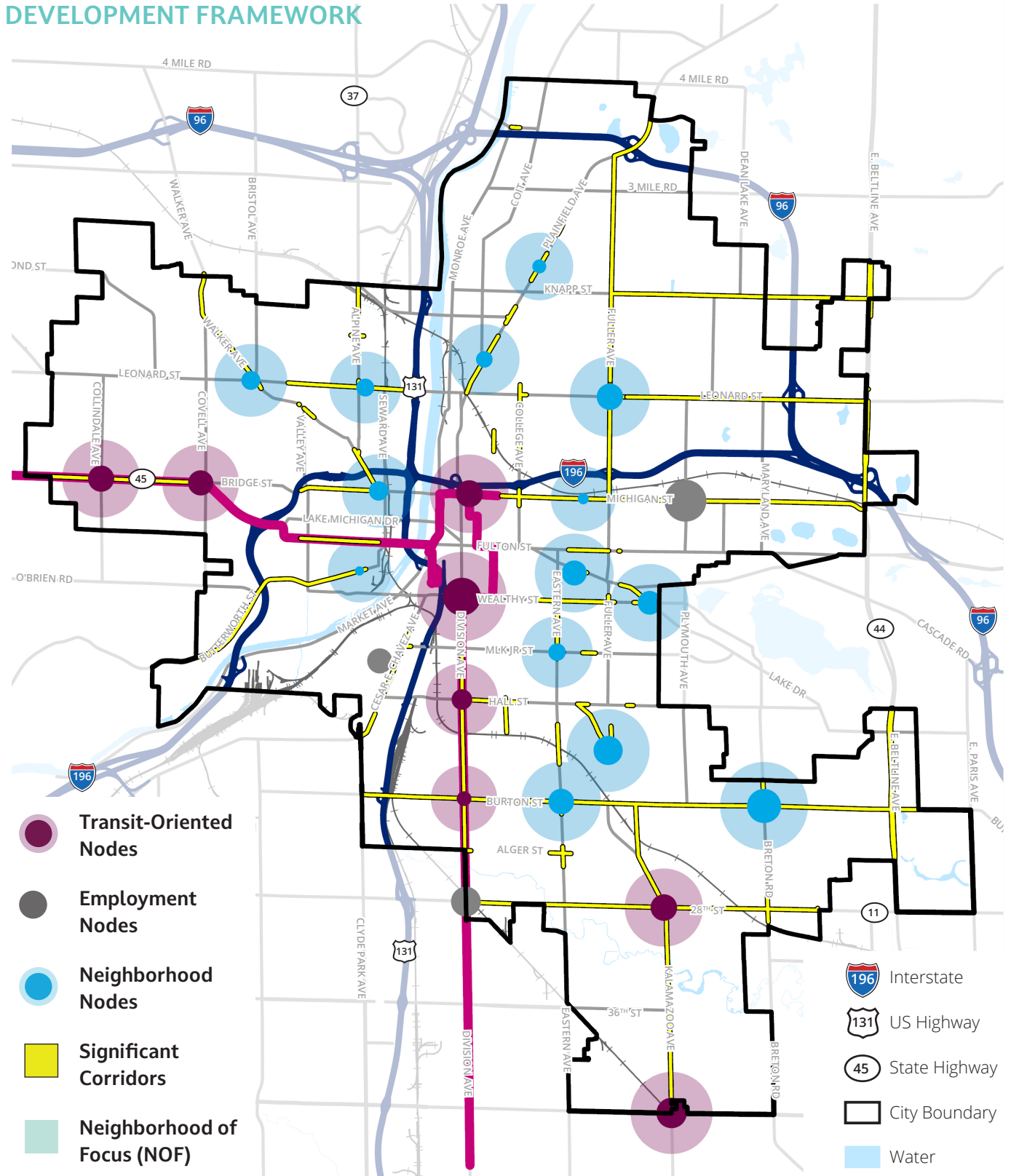
Determining desired future land use changes in Grand Rapids required first developing an understanding of current land use and development patterns.






HIGHLIGHTS OF HOW LAND IS USED TODAY







- **Position within the state and region.** At approximately 45 square miles (29,000 acres), Grand Rapids is roughly one-third the size of Detroit. However, the city makes up only a small portion of the county’s land area (five percent).
- **Residential land.** Approximately 35% of the land in the city is single-family residential. That percentage increases to which increases to 43% when two- or more-unit structures are included. Complementing neighborhoods and enhancing housing is an important piece of land use decisions.
- **Industrial Land.** Industrial is integrated along key corridors. Industrial land today covers six percent (1,750 acres), primarily located along the Grand River and major roadways. These areas offer unique opportunities for future redevelopment. With limited land availability, relocating industry within the city would require careful consideration.
- **Park Space.** Approximately 80% of residents are within a 10-minute walk to parks. Most residents are within walking distance of either a neighborhood or city park. This includes public parks, schools, and open spaces available for use by the public.



DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK




-  Transit-Oriented Nodes
-  Employment Nodes
-  Neighborhood Nodes
-  Significant Corridors
-  Neighborhood of Focus (NOF)


-  Interstate
-  US Highway
-  State Highway
-  City Boundary
-  Water
-  Bus Rapid Transit


DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK


Nodes are places where people and transportation routes congregate and converge. They are typically pedestrian-friendly areas where high concentrations and a wide variety of residential, employment, retail, and other uses are located. The nodes identified in the Community Master Plan indicate the planned future context of the area and identify opportunities for future development to meet the policy intentions of this plan.


Nodes

 **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.

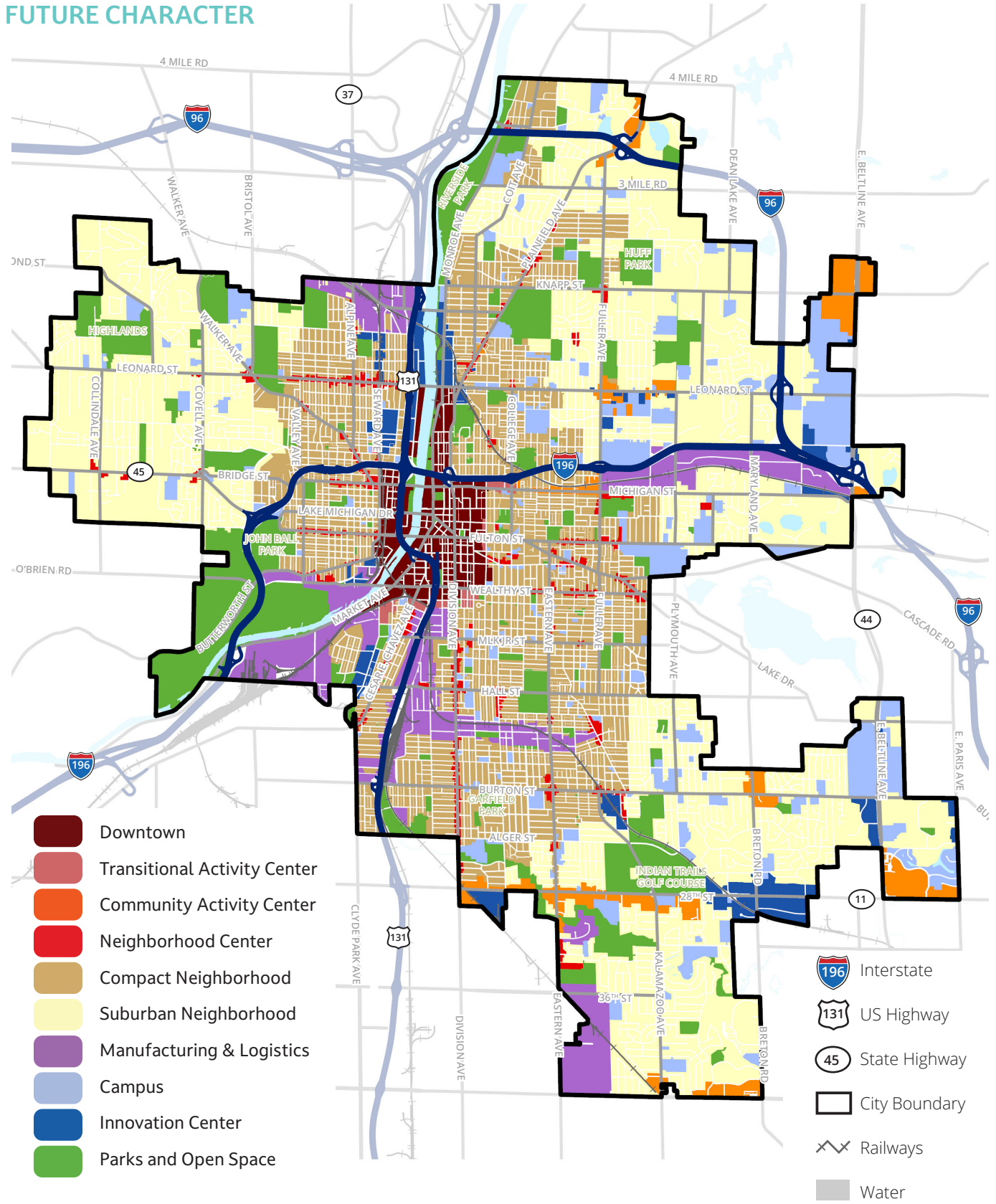
 **Employment Nodes** host a mix of employment opportunities either within the node or in the surrounding areas. These nodes encourage growth within areas that support or could support regionally significant concentrations of non-retail employment including institutional, office, and industrial centers.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

 **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 nodes.

 **Significant Corridors** are important connectors along which safety and access for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-car modes should be prioritized. These corridors connect residents to important places in the community, such as the nodes described above. Increased residential density may be appropriate along significant corridors. Enhancements may include investments in sidewalks, crosswalks, bicycle routes, traffic calming, street trees, street lighting, and other public realm improvement, in line with the Vital Streets Plan.

 **Neighborhoods of Focus (NOF)** 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, therefore is intentional to invest in these areas.

FUTURE CHARACTER



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

- Interstate
- US Highway
- State Highway
- City Boundary
- Railways
- Water

BRIDGE TO OUR FUTURE

FUTURE CHARACTER MAP

The Character 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 type describes 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. They encompass a range of conditions that can apply to places citywide. In this way, the Future Character 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 potential future zoning updates and will be implemented through the administration of the City’s zoning regulations 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**

NOTE

This element of the Community Master Plan is implemented through the City’s Zoning Ordinance. Zoning is a legal tool that regulates land use and the intensity of development, 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.

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.

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.

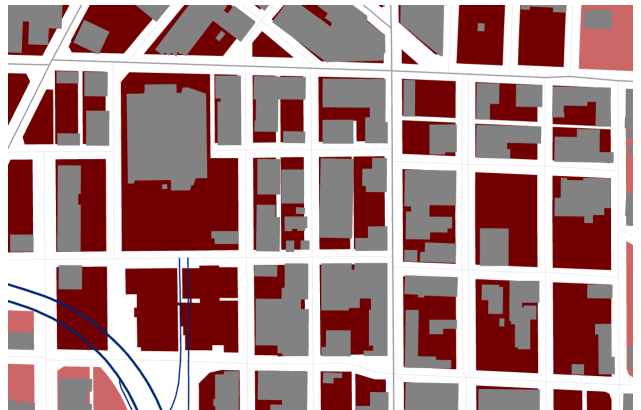
APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- City Center

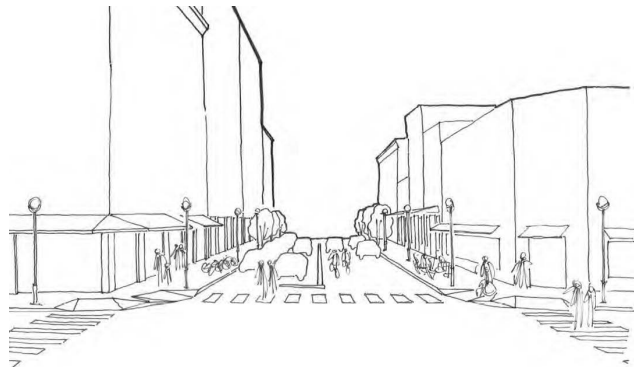
EXAMPLE CHARACTER



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 with commercial, institutional, multi-family or a mix of uses.
- 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

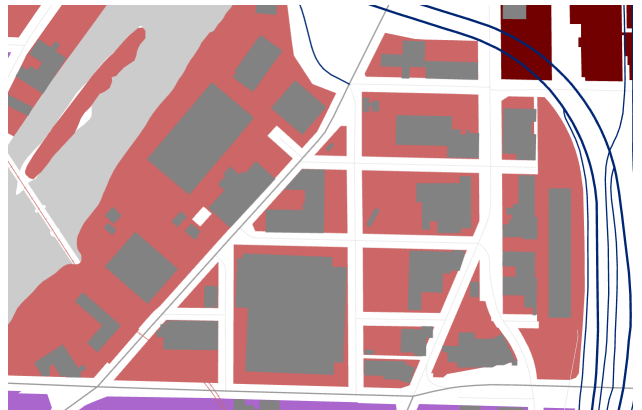
APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- Transitional City Center
- Transit Oriented Development

EXAMPLE CHARACTER



EXAMPLE PATTERN



COMMUNITY ACTIVITY CENTER

INTENT

Provide places to live, work, and shop around key intersections, to create 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.
- These areas have the potential to become less auto-oriented through incremental development and improved multi-modal infrastructure.

BUILDING FORM

- Predominantly low- to mid-rise with commercial, institutional, multi-family or a mix of uses.
- Buildings are 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.

MOBILITY

- Typically located at or near key intersections or on major corridors with transit service.
- The street network is or will redevelop to be well-connected, with walkable connections along streets and between destinations.

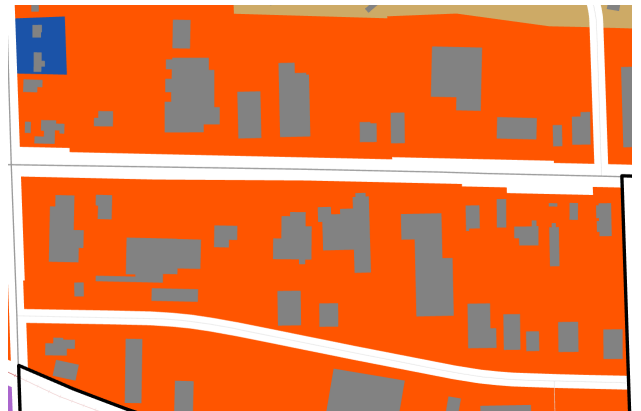
APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- Commercial
- Neighborhood Office Service
- Planned Redevelopment

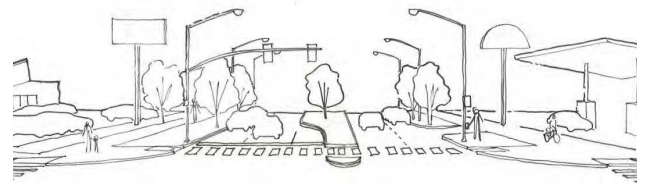
EXAMPLE CHARACTER



EXAMPLE PATTERN



CONNECTION TO THE VITAL STREETS PLAN: CROSTOWN 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, restaurants, and personal services at a local, neighborhood scale are provided within nodes and corridors.

BUILDING FORM

- The typical building does not exceed three stories.
- 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

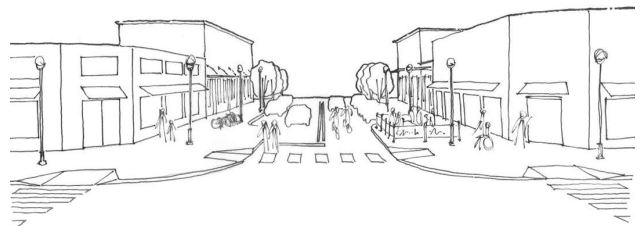
EXAMPLE CHARACTER



EXAMPLE PATTERN



CONNECTION TO THE VITAL STREETS PLAN: NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS



COMPACT NEIGHBORHOOD

INTENT

Create, maintain, and promote a variety of housing opportunities to meet the needs of a diverse population while maintaining the desired physical characteristics of the City's existing neighborhoods.

LAND USE

- A mix of housing with small office, commercial, and civic uses integrated at intersections or along major streets, including those designated as Network Residential in the Vital Streets Plan.

BUILDING FORM

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

OPEN SPACE

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

MOBILITY

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

APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

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

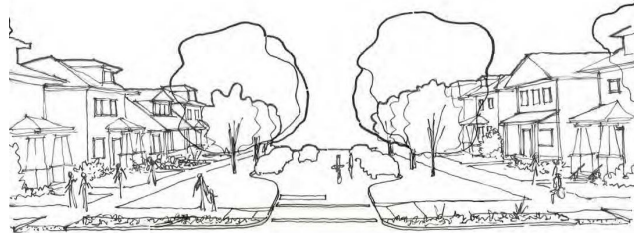
EXAMPLE CHARACTER



EXAMPLE PATTERN



CONNECTION TO THE VITAL STREETS PLAN: LINK 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 options.

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.

BUILDING FORM

- Characterized by a range of housing sizes and styles, including duplexes and accessory dwelling units.
- Lots are typically larger than in Compact Neighborhood areas

OPEN SPACE

- Private yards and built common areas are typical.
- Public open spaces such as small parks 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.
- Cul-de-sacs 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

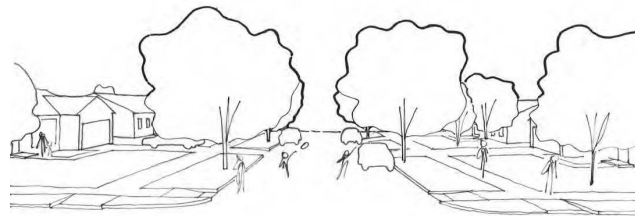
EXAMPLE CHARACTER



EXAMPLE PATTERN



CONNECTION TO THE VITAL STREETS PLAN: NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTIAL



MANUFACTURING & LOGISTICS

INTENT

Allow for a wide range of types, services, and wage levels in sectors such as production, manufacturing, research, distribution, and logistics while preserving the character and integrity of 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 and designed to be used 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 vehicles and truck traffic.
- Where possible, transit stations, bike parking and bike share, and micro-mobility options should be provided.

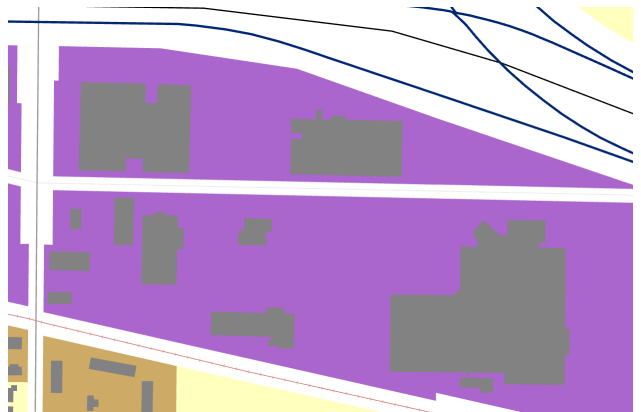
APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- Industrial Transportation
- Commercial
- Planned Redevelopment

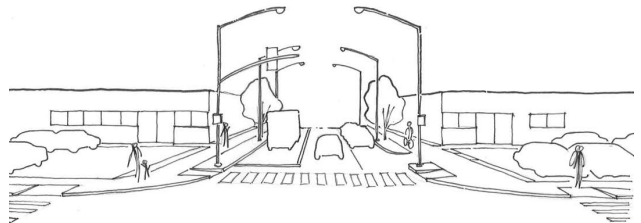
EXAMPLE CHARACTER



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, civic, athletic or recreational, and medical office uses.

LAND USE

- Defined by larger, campus-like settings that promote a safe and attractive environment through consolidation of driveways, increased pedestrian connections, and robust landscaping.
- Academic, government, religious, or community-focused uses may be present in a campus setting

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 businesses.
- 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.

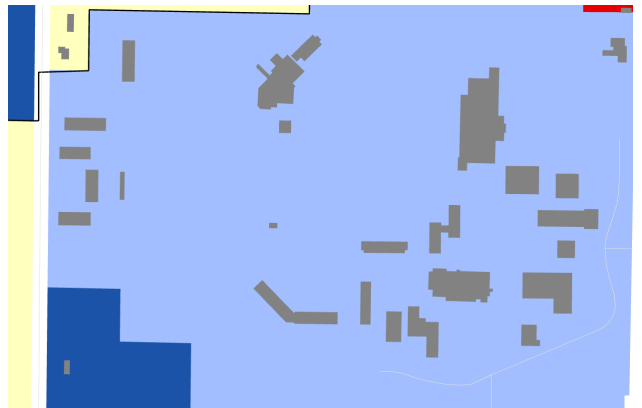
APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

- Institutional Campus
- Transit Oriented Development
- Planned Redevelopment

EXAMPLE CHARACTER



EXAMPLE PATTERN



INNOVATION CENTER

INTENT

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.
- They 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 supporting amenities.
- New buildings are designed with active ground floor uses.

OPEN SPACE

- Open spaces such as plazas, patios, and courtyards may include landscaping.
- Public spaces such as small parks and natural open spaces are also common.

MOBILITY

- Streets serve all travel modes.
- Transit stations, pick-up and drop-off areas, bike parking and share, and micro-mobility options should be provided.

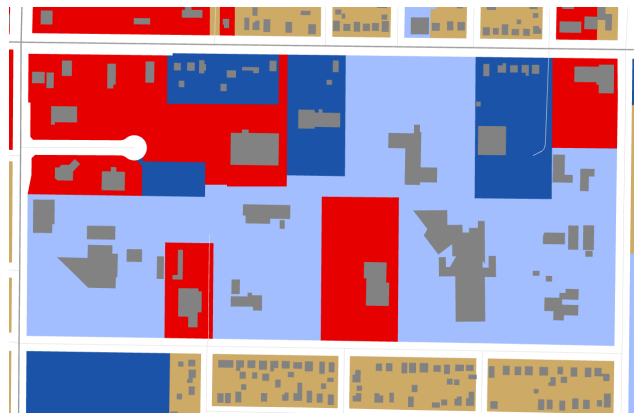
APPROPRIATE ZONING DISTRICTS

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

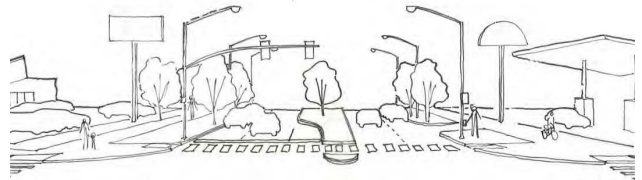
EXAMPLE CHARACTER



EXAMPLE PATTERN



CONNECTION TO THE VITAL STREETS PLAN: CROSSTOWN CONNECTORS



PARKS & OPEN SPACE

INTENT

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

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 include 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



NEIGHBORHOOD CLASSIFICATIONS

Grand Rapids can be characterized as having three distinct residential neighborhood geographies—Traditional Neighborhoods, Mid-20th Century Neighborhoods, and Modern Neighborhoods. These classifications were established with the 2002 Master Plan and are reflected in the adopted Zoning Ordinance.

TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS

Developed prior to the automobile era, these neighborhoods were designed to provide residents with a variety of commercial, institutional, and residential options within a short walking distance. Housing includes options such as single-family homes and apartments above storefronts, as well as integrated commercial and institutional uses. Diversity in building size 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 wall oriented parallel to the street;
- Well-defined building entries and windows constituting at least 50% of the street-facing wall;
- Pedestrian and transit orientation, with widespread provision of on-street parking and off-street surface parking areas that are located at the rear of the lot; and
- Integrated residential and nonresidential land uses located in the same building or in proximity to one another without extensive buffering.

MID-20TH CENTURY NEIGHBORHOODS

These neighborhoods reflect the transition in American society after World War II towards an automobile-dependent development pattern. Homes in this period were generally built between 1936 and 1979. Residential neighborhoods have a more spacious feel with larger lots and buildings located further from the street. Many homes were built on existing lots, platted before their construction. Streets and neighborhoods are less connected; and land uses are segregated from one another, including separation of apartment buildings from single-family housing. More intense commercial and institutional uses are found on highly visible corners and along heavily traveled traffic corridors in strip developments.

The characteristics of the built environment of a Mid-20th Century Neighborhood include:

- Curvilinear streets with sporadic cul-de-sacs 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; and
- Simplified building articulation and massing.

MODERN ERA NEIGHBORHOODS

These neighborhoods represent the most recent trends in home building and neighborhood planning. Many homes in these neighborhoods were built after the 1980's. Land patterns within these neighborhoods have been developed to serve individual uses. Major roadways connect these uses to each other. Street and neighborhood connectivity is less evident and the presence of sidewalks is often limited.

The existing development pattern of segregated land uses, cul-de-sacs, and a strong automobile orientation are intended to be minimized over time. Alternative high-quality design approaches shall promote multi-family developments within walking distance of transit and the restructuring of existing commercial concentrations as walkable mixed-use centers.

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.

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 Guidelines is to ensure new development complements neighborhood patterns and character as density increases, by providing guiding principles for new construction to coexist within the context of adjacent homes, blocks, and existing neighborhoods. They support the construction of compatible, pedestrian oriented, and high-quality housing in Grand Rapids neighborhoods.

The Housing Guidelines do not provide customized recommendations for every neighborhood. They provide recommendations for developers, the public, City staff, and other decision makers on using context to drive design and approvals and should be used in coordination with Area Specific Plans.

The guidelines do not demand a certain design aesthetic, nor do they dictate materials. By encouraging best practices, the guidelines aim to provide a framework that allows for new types of development to occur in a way that is compatible with existing development. As the city grows and changes, its needs will continue to evolve. These guidelines attempt to allow for flexibility and innovation in policy, building, and site design.



DESIGN GUIDELINES

Compatible

Build on the context of the place and advance the vision of relevant Area Specific Plans.

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

2 Relate to the local architectural and development patterns.

Pedestrian Oriented

Contribute to an active and inclusive public realm.

3 Provide transitions from public to private spaces.

4 Provide usable spaces for social interaction.

5 Minimize the impact of parking areas and utilities.

High Quality

Design resilient and visually interesting buildings.

6 Execute a clear design concept.

7 Utilize resilient 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 and patterns found within the area into new development and building alterations.
- Acknowledge significant or iconic community structures and spaces, such as historic or cultural resources, civic amenities, natural areas, bridges, and boundaries.

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, fenestration, color, or materials.
- Use trees and landscaping to enhance the building design and fit with the surrounding landscape context.
- Maintain consistent setbacks, cultivate an active public realm, and continue patterns of entries, windows, and vernacular features.
- Provide landscaping, porches, and multiple unit entries at an interval that relates to existing development. This can effectively ease transitions between new, denser development and existing, less dense development.

3 Provide layered transitions from public to private spaces.

Strategies to meet this guideline:

- Buffer ground floor residential units with generous landscaping to provide privacy for residents.
- Use vertical separation (balconies or porches) to soften the street edge and provide semi-public spaces for social interaction.
- Provide setbacks consistent with the immediate context.
- Utilize landscaped setbacks and entry sequences that reflect nearby residential patterns.

4 Provide usable spaces for 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 building services.

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 full-height screening complementary to the building architecture and materials.

6 Execute a coherent and legible design concept.

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 this is appropriate, particularly along primary neighborhood corridors.

7 Utilize resilient, durable, and enduring materials in building design.

Strategies to meet this guideline:

- Building exteriors should be constructed of durable and maintainable materials.
- Ensure that all facades are attractive and well-proportioned through the placement and detailing of all elements. Consider projections, fenestration, materials, and any patterns created by their arrangement.
- 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.
- When possible, design the project so that it may be deconstructed at the end of its useful lifetime, with connections and assembly techniques that will allow reuse of materials.

8 Integrate exterior building features to provide depth and articulation.

Strategies to meet this guideline:

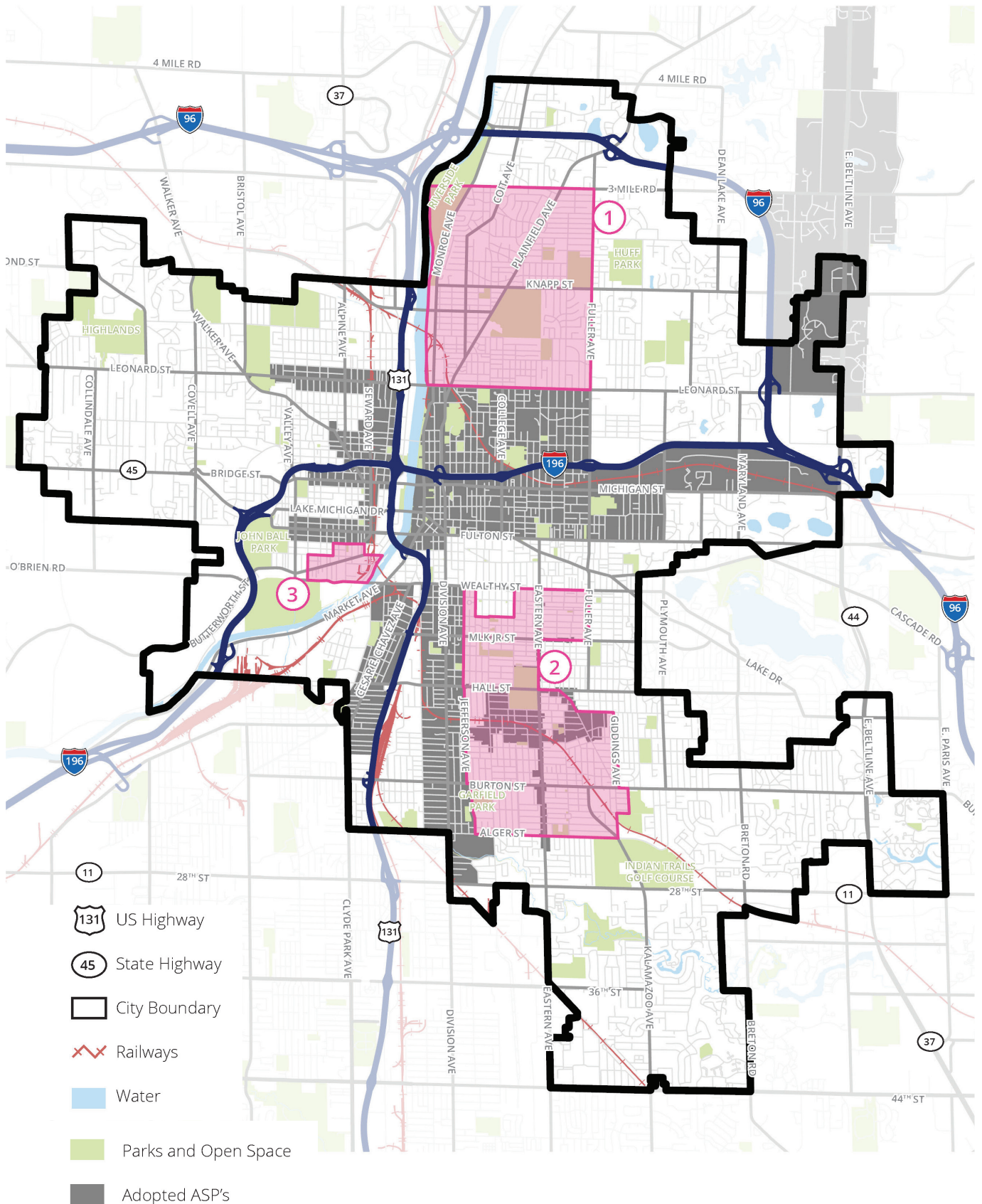
- Add depth to facades where appropriate by incorporating façade articulation, window depth, and material fenestration.
- Incorporate street-facing decks on upper stories of multi-family buildings to provide private open space visible to the adjacent street.
- Utilize distinctive and high-quality surface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

6. AREA SPECIFIC PLANS







An Area Specific Plan (ASP) is a neighborhood-specific framework intended to guide future improvements and investments in areas such as land use, zoning, transportation, and neighborhood character. ASPs are led by the City of Grand Rapids together with neighborhood organizations, community residents, businesses, and property owners. To date, the City has completed 11 ASPs. Three additional ASPs have been developed in conjunction with the Community Master Plan (CMP) in the Butterworth, Creston, and Southtown neighborhoods. The initiatives within each of these ASPs are aligned with the larger citywide vision in the CMP.

The Community Master Plan (CMP) serves as a guiding document with a vision and overarching goals and establishes specific action steps to implement them. The Area Specific Plans (ASPs) follow the spirit of these goals and lay out strategies at a more granular level to show how this larger vision and goals are accomplished in response to the specific needs of communities.



AREA SPECIFIC PLANS

The goal of an ASP is to provide recommendations that address the needs and aspirations of people living, working, and building community in a particular geographic area. As a result, community input and an understanding of existing neighborhood conditions are the foundation of every ASP. Engagement efforts include community meetings aimed at shaping the direction of the plans.

-  **MASTER PLAN ASPs**
-  **CRESTON NEIGHBORHOOD**
-  **SOUTHTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD**
-  **BUTTERSWORTH AREA**

CRESTON

ASP OVERVIEW

STUDY AREA BOUNDARY

The Creston Area Specific Plan is bounded by the Grand River, 3 Mile Road, Fuller Avenue, and Leonard Street.

LAND USES

Creston is primarily a residential community with industrial areas along the rail lines and Monroe Avenue, and a commercial street in Plainfield Avenue which bisects the neighborhood diagonally.

DEFINING FEATURES

Defining features within or adjacent to the study area include Riverside Park, Kent Country Club, the Plainfield commercial district, and the Grand River.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

The engagement process for the ASPs included two rounds of in-person public meetings to present findings from the existing conditions analysis, share initial ideas, and gather community input.



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES ABOUT FUTURE LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

- More housing options, including affordable and “missing middle”.
- Support for higher density along Plainfield and the riverfront, with lower density and ADUs in the inner neighborhood.
- Consider environmental impact of new development.
- Increase commercial activity and growth while supporting existing businesses.
- Include low-income housing and encourage local homeownership.
- Develop design guidelines that complement neighborhood character.



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES ABOUT INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SPACE

- Prioritize and enhance safe bike and pedestrian infrastructure, especially along major corridors.
- Preserve and improve public access to the riverfront.
- Increase bike and pedestrian-friendly connections, amenities, and more active recreation spaces.
- Improve public transit and reduce congestion.
- Increase greening and use of native plants.
- Activate vacant storefronts and underutilized open spaces as plazas for events and community gatherings.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

A COLLECTION OF RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES UNITED BY PLAINFIELD AVENUE

Creston proudly proclaims itself as the largest neighborhood in Grand Rapids. Plainfield Avenue is the connective tissue and de facto meeting place that unites this large geography and creates a cohesive community. Because of this vital role, investments in the corridor that improve connectivity, support businesses, and provide new housing will have an outsized impact on the surrounding community.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD IS EXPERIENCING THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF INVESTMENT SEEN IN DECADES

Apartment buildings under construction are just a few of the visible signs of the major investments currently taking place in Creston. Coupled with proposed development projects along Monroe North, Creston is poised to benefit from the new residents and businesses that will soon call the neighborhood home. Building off this momentum will be critical for Creston to leverage investments that help meet neighborhood goals.

OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO CREATE A MORE VIBRANT AND CONNECTED RIVERFRONT

The industrial nature of Creston's riverfront is rapidly changing. Proposed investments seek to further transform the neighborhood away from industry to a more residential mixed-use character. Finding the right balance between support for long-term businesses and encouraging residential development and new format businesses will help to create a vibrant riverfront district that maintains its unique character.

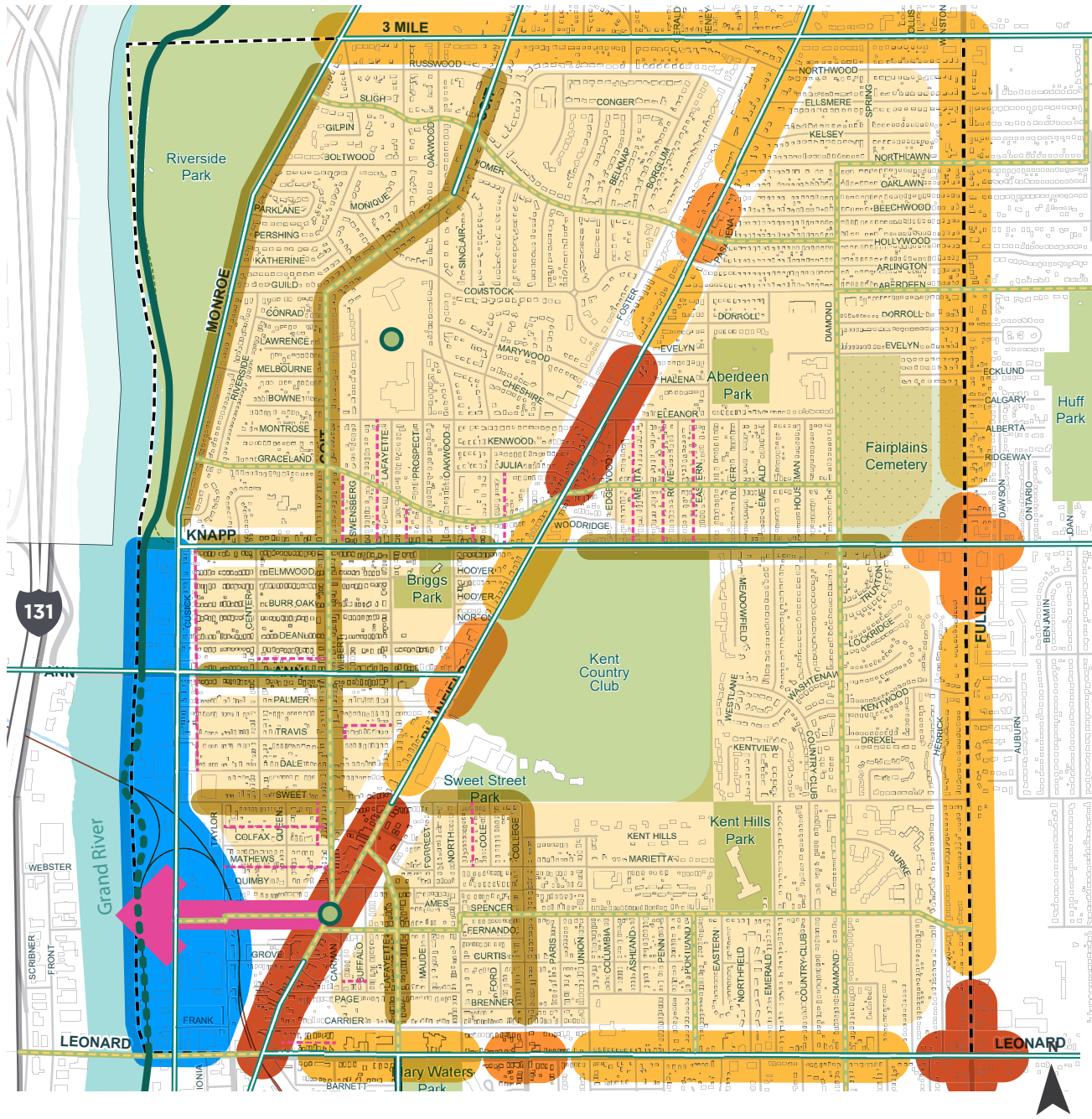
MOST PARKS ARE ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND CONNECTIONS CAN BE CHALLENGING

Riverside Park, Huff Park, Ball Perkins Park, Highland Park, and Belknap Park are some of the crown jewels of the Grand Rapids park system and are located adjacent to Creston. The burgeoning trail network along the Grand River will soon connect Creston to neighborhoods north and south with a safe, off-street connection. Finding opportunities to not only improve these assets but better connect the community to them will advance the quality of life for Creston residents.

PLAINFIELD AVENUE IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING, YET RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS ARE STATIC.

Zoning along the Plainfield Avenue commercial district and the riverfront allows for a variety of densities and housing types. Within Creston neighborhoods, there are few opportunities for redevelopment due to the lack of vacant properties and single-family zoning. To create more diverse housing options and address affordability issues, Creston must look at ways to add housing units within its single-family residential neighborhoods.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASEMAP



- Innovation District
- Neighborhood Hub
- Primarily Single Family Residential District
- Transit Corridor / Network Street
- Open Space Improvement
- Existing Alley
- Existing Bike Lane
- Proposed Bike Lane
- Important River Connection
- Existing Trail
- Proposed Trail
- Area Boundary

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. AFFORDABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

- A.1 Allow for denser housing on key corridors.** Major streets with public transit access may support housing of up to six units.
- A.2 Allow for a variety of housing types in single-family districts.** Incremental density in the way of duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and accessory dwelling units in zoning districts where single-family homes are the predominant housing type.
- A.3 Encourage Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) within the neighborhood.** The existing alley network can best support accessory dwelling units with better access and the potential to convert, or add to, existing garages.
- A.4 Support existing homeowners and renters.** Targeted programs can help residents facing rising rents and costly repairs.

B. A LIVELY AND UNIQUE NEIGHBORHOOD (A.K.A KEEP CRESTON WEIRD)

- B.1 Redevelop the riverfront as an Innovation Center.** The riverfront can accommodate a broad range of flexible employment opportunities, with a focus on active ground-floor uses.
- B.2 Support neighborhood hubs with new mixed-use development.** Hubs are opportunities for larger-scale residential development that can create new density to support the existing commercial corridors.

C. SAFER, WALKABLE STREETS

- C.1 Improve pedestrian and cycling connections on Plainfield Ave.** Focus attention within neighborhood nodes for pedestrians to safely cross from one side of Plainfield to the other.
- C.2 Add bike infrastructure throughout the neighborhood.** The existing Bicycle Action Plan identifies new bicycle facilities throughout the neighborhood.

D. REVITALIZED AND CONNECTED OPEN SPACES

- D.1 Create a plaza where Coit Avenue meets Plainfield Ave.** Closing one block of Coit Avenue, from Plainfield to Quimby, can create a key gathering and programming space for the community.
- D.2 Better connect Plainfield Avenue to the riverfront along key streets.** Caledonia Street sits at a key location, connecting the river and trail to the heart of the Plainfield Avenue commercial corridor.
- D.3 Work to complete the Grand River trail through the neighborhood.** A major gap in the Grand River trail exists through Creston from Ann Street to Leonard Street.
- D.4 Focus on greening residential portions of Plainfield Ave.** This may include new trees, green infrastructure, and other beautification efforts.
- D.5 Establish community vision for redeveloped Riverside Middle School park space.** The neighborhood should coordinate with GRPS to improve the park space in tandem with school renovations to better serve the neighborhood.

SOUTHTOWN

ASP OVERVIEW

STUDY AREA BOUNDARY

The Southtown Area Specific Plan is bounded by Wealthy, Lafayette, Pleasant, Union, Fuller, MLK, Eastern, Hall, Kalamazoo, Adams, Giddings, Burton, Oakfield, Kalamazoo, Alger, and Jefferson.

LAND USES

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

Defining features within or adjacent to the study area include Pleasant Park, Oakhill Cemetery, Garfield Park, and the commercial corridors on Division, Madison, and Eastern.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

The engagement process for the ASPs included two rounds of in-person public meetings to present findings from the existing conditions analysis, share initial ideas, and gather community input.



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES ABOUT FUTURE LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

- Prioritize housing affordability and increase the range of affordable housing options.
- Support for ADUs and lower density development.
- Support for increased density and mixed use development along key corridors, while prioritizing affordability.
- Consider incremental development and ease of housing regulations to support sustainable, equitable development.
- Prioritize design guidelines, energy efficiency upgrades and quality of construction.



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES ABOUT INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SPACE

- Prioritize investment in public transit, biking, and pedestrian pathways over parking.
- Integrate amenities such as bus shelters, benches, and green spaces into multi-family developments to enhance community interaction and livability.
- Celebrate and enhance the unique character of key neighborhood corridors as community assets.
- Preserve and enhance neighborhood parks.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

SOUTHTOWN IS A COLLECTION OF RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES AND BUSINESS CORRIDORS, ALL WITH THEIR OWN IDENTITY

Southtown is made up of no less than 7 neighborhoods. While united by common commercial corridors and public spaces, each neighborhood is unique with its own challenges. It is important to consider the nuance of each neighborhood when crafting collective strategies.

PROXIMATE TO DOWNTOWN AND WITH VACANT LAND, SOUTHTOWN IS FEELING DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE

Due to its proximity to Downtown, Southtown is susceptible to many of the same development pressures and investment continues to move south. The high concentration of vacant properties compounds the issue as they are easier to redevelop. New investment could provide many benefits to a neighborhood that has experienced decades of disinvestment, but it will be important that those who benefit are those who need it most.

HOUSING COSTS ARE A MAJOR ISSUE FOR RESIDENTS

Many of the existing residents in Southtown are cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on rent. Renters are more susceptible to price increases which is an issue in a neighborhood that is disproportionately represented by renters compared to the city. Homeowners are often no better off with an older housing stock that is difficult and expensive to maintain. Finding ways to make housing more affordable for both renters and homeowners will be a particular priority for Southtown.

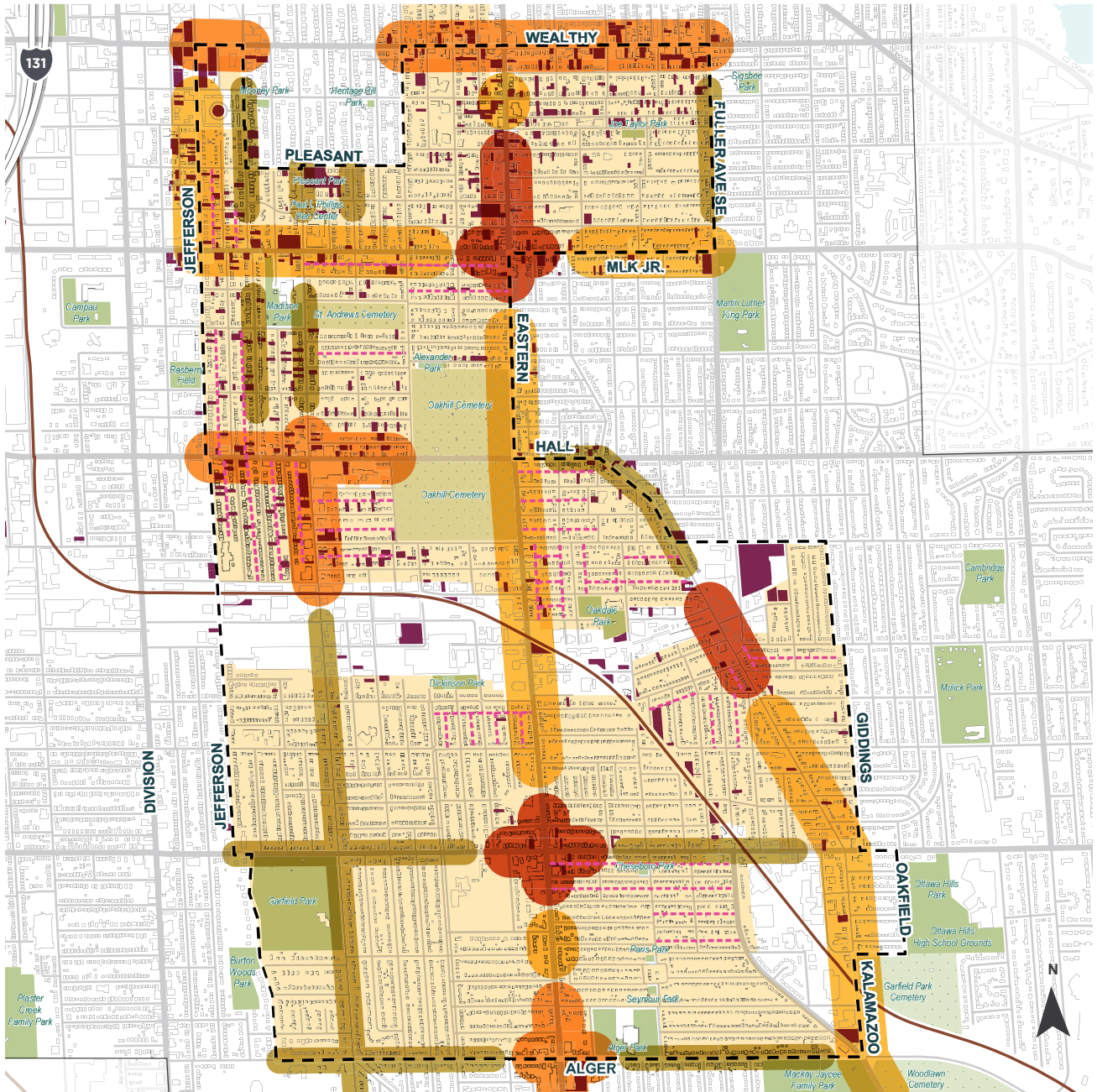
EXISTING RESIDENTS NEED TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BENEFIT FROM NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENTS

Many Southtown residents have lived in the neighborhood for decades and experienced its highs and lows. As new investments take place, it will be important for the long-term residents to be able to benefit. Protections need to be put in place to keep residents in their homes and improve directly from investments by others.

THE DESIGN AND SCALE OF NEW DEVELOPMENT IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

The City classifies Southtown development patterns as both traditional and mid-century and the existing building types help to give each neighborhood their own unique character. As development moves in, it will be important for any new buildings to consider the adjacent context to be good neighbors and not detract from the sense of place.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASEMAP



BRIDGE TO OUR FUTURE

- Vacant Land
- Neighborhood Hubs
- Primarily Single Family Residential District
- Transit Corridor / Network Street
- Existing Alley
- Area Boundary

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT DISPLACEMENT

- A.1 Evaluate public lands for use as affordable housing development.** Explore partnerships across City departments for use of underutilized publicly owned land for affordable housing.
- A.2 Support and expand Community Land Trust.** Build off the success of the 2080 Union Avenue project.
- A.3 Allow for denser housing on key corridors.** Major streets with public transit access may support housing of up to six units.
- A.4 Allow for a variety of housing types in single-family districts.** Incremental density in the way of duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and accessory dwelling units in zoning districts where single-family homes are the predominant housing type.
- A.5 Encourage Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) within the neighborhood.** The existing alley network can best support accessory dwelling units with better access and the potential to convert, or add to, existing garages.

B. A COMMUNITY BUILT BY ALL FOR ALL

- B.1 Home Repairs Programs.** Provide technical and financial assistance for home repairs
- B.2 Preserve existing affordable housing.** Identify affordable housing units due to expire and coordinate with property owners to ensure their status.
- B.2 Develop mechanisms to protect residents from displacement.** Policies that promote density should go hand in hand with protections for long-term homeowners, so they are not priced out of the neighborhood.
- B.3 Create pathways for residents to provide input on new development.** Create a process for developers to meet with neighborhood organizations throughout development.
- B.4 Support training for resident-led small-scale development.** Ensure residents have options to take part in new development opportunities.

C. PRESERVE LOCAL CULTURE

- C.1 Support neighborhood hubs with new mixed-use development.** Hubs are opportunities for larger-scale residential development which can create new density to support the existing commercial corridors.
- C.2 Identify vacant lots to be activated as green space.** Find opportunities to create new pocket parks on vacant land similar to what is found in Alger Heights.
- C.4 Implement design guidelines for large lot infill that build upon existing development regulations.** Ensure that new development is contextual and of a high quality.

BUTTERWORTH

ASP OVERVIEW

STUDY AREA BOUNDARY

The Butterworth Area Specific Plan is bounded by Watson, Lexington, Butterworth, Front, Wealthy, Marion, Park, and Deloney.

LAND USES

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

Defining features within or adjacent to the study area include the GVSU Pew Campus, the Grand River, Westtown Commons Park, the Padnos scrap yard, the former Butterworth Landfill, and regional trail connections.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

The engagement process for the ASPs included two rounds of in-person public meetings to present findings from the existing conditions analysis, share initial ideas, and gather community input.



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES ABOUT FUTURE LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

- Support for higher density along key corridors, while preserving low density in established residential areas.
- Engage the community to preserve the interests of current residents.
- Prioritize high-quality construction and design guidelines in new development.
- Increase housing options for a wide range of household sizes and income levels, and add handicap-accessible units.
- Streamline housing development regulations for development, with a focus on ADUs.



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES ABOUT INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SPACE

- Strengthen Butterworth as a shopping corridor and commercial hub.
- Prioritize safe bike and pedestrian infrastructure, especially protected bikelanes.
- Improve public spaces to serve multiple users, including families, students, local businesses, and employees.
- Increase public access to the riverfront, maintenance and quality of green spaces, and public amenities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

THE RIVERFRONT IS POISED TO CHANGE IN THE COMING YEARS

With direct access to rail, the Grand River, and the citywide landfill (in operation from 1950 to 1973), Butterworth flourished as an industrial district for decades. The closure of the landfill and the changing nature of transportation led Butterworth to lose its edge as an industrial district with only a few legacy businesses remaining today. Plans to grow the GVSU Pew Campus into former industrial land and continued investments in the higher-tech industrial sector highlighted by Grand River Aseptic will cause the district to continue to change.

NEIGHBORHOOD IS FEELING THE PRESSURE OF THE LOCAL HOUSING MARKET

Historically an affordable landing spot for a working-class immigrant population, Butterworth is now suffering the same housing affordability issues that much of the City of Grand Rapids is experiencing. As a neighborhood adjacent to downtown and within walking distance of GVSU's Pew Campus (and the thousands of students enrolled there), Butterworth has felt the problem more acutely.

BUTTERWORTH STREET IS IN A STATE OF TRANSITION

Butterworth Street serves many purposes for the neighborhood and the West Side: it is a neighborhood commercial corridor serving local needs; a light industrial center with auto repair shops and other similar uses; a residential street; and a heavily used truck route for major industrial uses outside of the neighborhood including the Coca-Cola bottling plant and the City of Grand Rapids Refuse Yard. Determining how all of these uses coexist will be important for the neighborhood to determine.

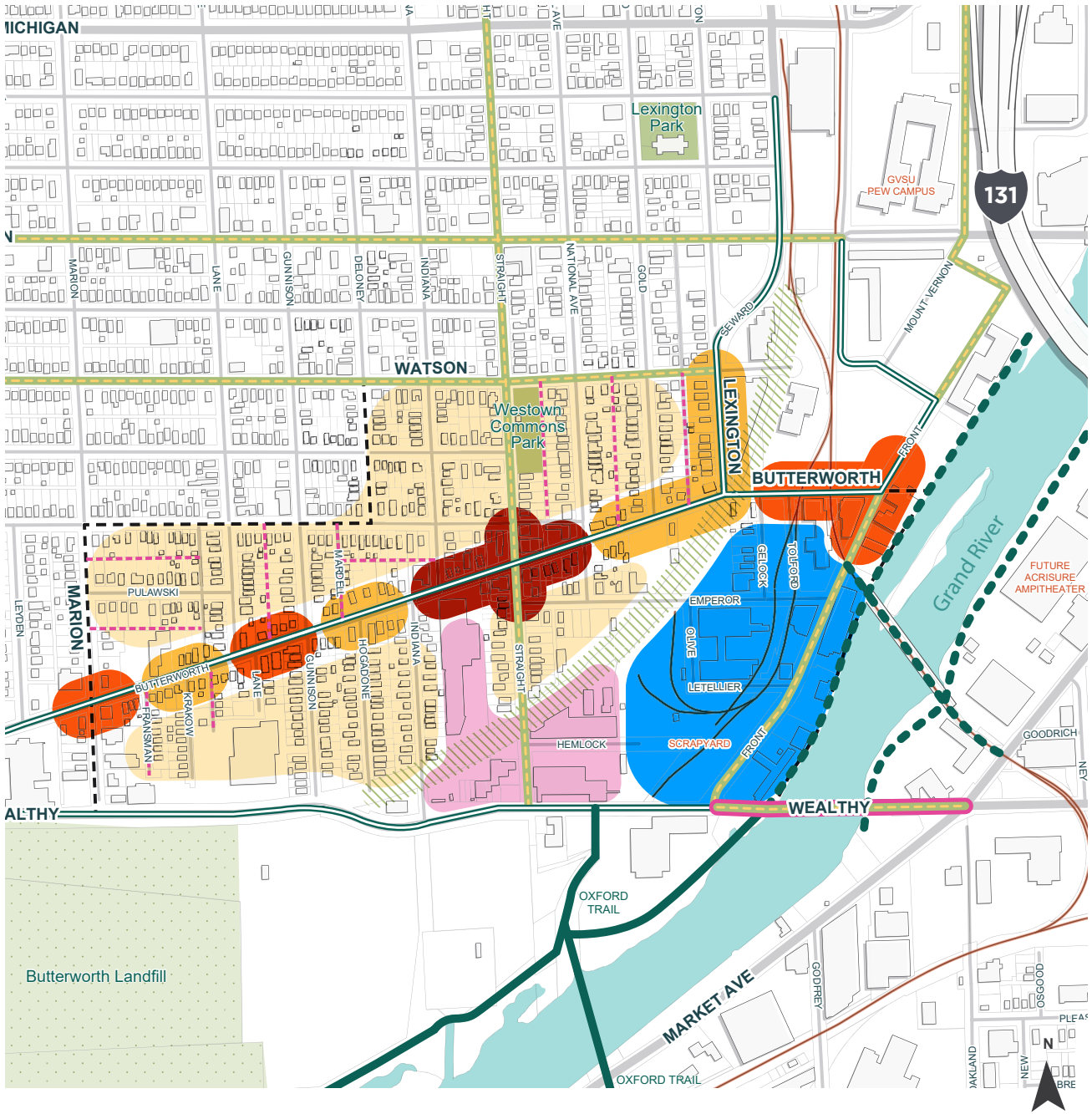
THE NEIGHBORHOOD IS A HUB FOR THE REGIONAL TRAIL NETWORK

Butterworth sits at the crossroads of numerous regional trail connections, including the Grand River Trail, Kent County Trails (with connections to Millennium Park), and the Oxford Trail (with future connections to the Plaster Creek Greenway). Investments to the existing network to help fill in gaps as well as enhanced trail accessibility will improve the neighborhood for future generations of Butterworth residents.

MAJOR PROJECTS WILL HAVE A BIG IMPACT ON THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Some of the largest investments in Grand Rapids are happening adjacent to Butterworth. The proposed Acrisure Amphitheater will transform the former city street maintenance yard across the Grand River into an outdoor music venue, trail, and public space. A proposed new soccer stadium will replace the DASH surface parking lots north of Lake Michigan Drive into a multipurpose sports facility. The expansion of the GVSU Pew Campus with new residential and academic buildings will bring additional buildings and people to what are now parking lots. All of these investments will impact the future of Butterworth and may spur smaller-scale investments in the neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASEMAP



- Innovation District
- Art/Maker District
- Primarily Single Family Residential District
- Neighborhood Hub
- Transit Corridor
- Green/Open Space
- Existing Alley
- Existing Bike Lane
- Proposed Bike Lane
- Proposed Bike/Bridge Improvement
- Existing Trail
- Proposed Trail
- Area Boundary

BRIDGE TO OUR FUTURE

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. SUSTAINABLE, EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

- A.1 Allow for denser housing on key corridors.** Major streets with public transit access may support housing of up to six units.
- A.2 Allow for a variety of housing types in single-family districts.** Incremental density in the way of duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and accessory dwelling units in zoning districts where single-family homes are the predominant housing type.
- A.3 Encourage Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) within the neighborhood.** The existing alley network can best support accessory dwelling units with better access and the potential to convert, or add to, existing garages.
- A.4 Rehab and reuse existing structures.** Rehabilitation is a cost-effective and environmentally friendly way to increase the number of housing units in the neighborhood.
- A.5 Supporting existing homeowners and renters.** Targeted programs can help residents facing rising rents and costly repairs.

B. A VIBRANT AND THRIVING BUSINESS COMMUNITY

- B.1 Redevelop the riverfront as an Innovation Center.** The riverfront can accommodate a broad range of flexible employment opportunities, with a focus on active ground-floor uses.
- B.2 Encourage adaptive reuse of existing buildings with a focus on spaces for artists and makers.** Support the burgeoning arts district near Straight and Wealthy and find ways to further market the area.
- B.3 Support Butterworth Street as a neighborhood-serving corridor.** Support new development on underutilized lots, maintain low-cost commercial buildings, and other improvements to add residents and support businesses.

C. SAFER, WALKABLE/BIKEABLE STREET

- C.1 Improve Butterworth Street for pedestrians and cyclists in neighborhood hubs.** Explore replacing sharrows with dedicated bike lanes and improved crosswalks at key intersections.
- C.2 Improve alleys as an alternative pedestrian network.** Collaborate among neighbors to beautify alleys with greening and art opportunities.
- C.3 Improve existing trail and bicycle connections within the neighborhood.** Opportunities include extending the Grand River trail, improved trailheads, and better bridge connections.

D. BEAUTIFUL NEIGHBORHOODS AND HEALTH, ACTIVE COMMUNITY SPACES

- D.1 Explore additional programming and ongoing stewardship of Westown Commons.** Work with neighborhood organizations to determine improvements and ongoing maintenance.
- D.2 Identify new public space opportunities in the neighborhood.** Opportunities exist to add new public gathering spaces along the vacant rail right-of-way and future pedestrian river connections.

IMPLEMENTATION



HOW TO USE THE PLAN

The Bridge to Our Future Community Master Plan is intended to 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 and actions 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 APPROVALS

Administrative and legislative approvals of development proposals, including rezoning, should be a central means of implementing the Plan. Decisions by the Planning Commission and City Commission should reference relevant Master Plan recommendations and policies. The zoning code and related regulations under the authority of the Planning Department should be updated in response to the policies presented in the Plan.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The City should align the capital improvement plan (CIP) with the recommendations of the CMP.

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 strategies of the Plan in their land planning and investment decisions. Public decision-makers will be using the Plan as a guide in their deliberations on zoning matters and development approvals. 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. It should be referenced 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

A major update of the Plan should be scheduled by the City Commission following a formal recommendation from the Planning Commission. The update should be considered at least every ten years. In the interim, key milestones may be reached which necessitate an update sooner than a ten-year cycle. Such milestones should be considered on a case-by-case basis. There may be circumstances that warrant formal amendment of the Plan. Amendments to the Plan should be made only with careful consideration and compelling justification.



hold for plan management cycle diagram

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

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 status, and whether it aligns with or supports a specific Value Thread.

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



R Regulations: Actions that could be implemented through the Framework zoning code rewrite or other update to city ordinances.



C Capital Project: Physical improvements to city facilities and infrastructure.



P Program: Programs or initiatives that may require some ongoing city support or participation.



O Policy: Direction used on an ongoing basis to guide city decisions.

ACTION STATUS



Ongoing: currently occurring on a repeating basis



Initiated: begun, but not yet complete



Future: to be initiated

TIMEFRAME



S Short-term (1-5 years)



M Medium-term (5-10 years)



L Long-term (10-20 years)

Action	Value Threads	Category	Status	Timeframe	Responsibility
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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.				
1.A.2	Implement design guidelines that build upon existing neighborhood development.				
1.A.3	Improve the relationship between higher-intensity and lower-intensity uses.				
1.A.4	Ensure public information about residential infill development is easy to access.				
1.A.5	Develop an anti-displacement strategy.				
1.A.6	Advocate for removal of state-level barriers to housing affordability and stability.				
1.A.7	Provide adequate resources to meet community needs.				
1.A.8	Support efforts to provide small-scale developer training to residents.				
1.A.9	Work with the larger metropolitan community to provide safe, stable, and affordable housing options.				

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

1.B.1	Support policies that encourage housing diversity based on income and housing types.				
1.B.2	Allow a greater variety of housing types in low-density residential zone districts.				
1.B.3	Allow higher density residential in the Mid-Century and Modern Era neighborhoods.				

Action	Value Threads	Category	Status	Timeframe	Responsibility
1.B.4 Assess and reduce barriers to innovative housing solutions (such as modular construction, prefabricated materials, and new building methods).					
1.B.5 Continue to increase homeownership opportunities.					
1.B.6 Support Community Development efforts described in the City of Grand Rapids and Kent County 2021 Regional Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice.					
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.					
1.C.2 Continue to enhance community assets through additional investments, including but not limited to green spaces.					
1.C.3 Ensure an equitable distribution of public parks and recreational facilities.					
1.C.4 Support the Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan.					
1.C.5 Improve accessibility to fresh foods throughout the community, with a focus on food deserts and economically challenged neighborhoods.					
1.C.6 Continue to support community gardens and promote an edible landscape.					
1.C.7 Expand City programs to improve housing conditions.					
1.C.8 Continue to promote the use of green infrastructure on individual home sites.					
1.C.9 Promote native plant use in home landscapes.					
1.C.10 Continue to work towards the City’s tree canopy goal.					
1.C.11 Support facilities that locally generate energy.					
1.C.12 Continue to encourage voluntary community benefits agreements.					

Action	Value Threads	Category	Status	Timeframe	Responsibility
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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.				
2.A.2	Direct dense development downtown and in areas and corridors served by regional transit routes.				
2.A.3	Support infill development at an appropriate scale.				
2.A.4	Support taller commercial buildings in commercial districts.				
2.A.5	Update the zoning ordinance to address the impacts of continued growth on business districts.				

2.B IMPROVE THE ACCESSIBILITY OF BUSINESS DISTRICTS.

2.B.1	Set maximum block sizes within Activity Centers identified on the Future Character and Land Use Map.				
2.B.2	Require a plan to encourage people to use modes of transportation other than driving alone when large developments are proposed within Activity Centers identified on the Future Character and Land Use Map.				

2.C.1 EVALUATE STRATEGIES TO PROTECT SIGNIFICANT COMMUNITY STRUCTURES.

2.C.2	Increase the capacity of the City's Corridor Improvement Authorities to have meaningful impact in their districts.				
2.C.3	Support private sector investments in green infrastructure.				
2.C.4	Continue to support public art championed by community organizations.				
2.C.4	Continue to support public art championed by community organizations.				

Action	Value Threads	Category	Status	Timeframe	Responsibility
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3 A STRONG ECONOMY

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

3.A.1	Consider a hybrid business use category within Innovation Districts identified on the Future Character and Land Use map.				
3.A.2	Support efforts to grow the greater Grand Rapids region into a major tech hub of the Midwest.				
3.A.3	Encourage the growth of the life sciences industries in and near the Medical Mile.				

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.				
3.B.2	Grow more jobs within the city that are near the workforce.				
3.B.3	Evaluate reuse of obsolete industrial for other purposes.				
3.B.4	Reposition underutilized commercial properties to support non-retail businesses.				
3.B.5	Evaluate, monitor, and enhance broadband access across the city.				

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

3.C.1	Promote the green economy.				
3.C.2	Amend the zoning ordinance to reduce the impact of industrial uses on surrounding areas.				
3.C.3	Continue brownfield remediation and redevelopment efforts.				

Action	Value Threads	Category	Status	Timeframe	Responsibility
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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.				
4.A.2	Address high-crash intersections and corridors through quick-build interventions.				
4.A.3	Provide citywide education and engagement about mobility projects and issues.				

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

4.B.1	Make strategic investments in bike facilities.				
4.B.2	Support shared mobility models to increase transportation choices.				
4.B.3	Promote electric bicycle and vehicle ownership.				
4.B.4	Support programs that encourage travel options other than personal vehicles.				
4.B.5	Support collaboration between businesses, organizations, and communities to expand commute options.				
4.B.6	Continue to invest in transit stop amenities.				
4.B.7	Work with Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to address highways, barriers to safe walking, bicycling and transit access.				

4.C COORDINATE LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION DECISIONS.

4.C.1	Reduce minimum parking requirements to support compact growth patterns.				
4.C.2	Limit the size of surface parking lots.				

Action	Value Threads	Category	Status	Timeframe	Responsibility
4.C.3 Establish mobility hubs at key nodes of activity.					
4.C.4 Develop comprehensive curbside management guidelines that address loading zones, drop-off/pickup zones, on-street parking, and bicycle/scooter parking.					
4.C.5 Consider modes of travel other than cars in the development review and approval process.					
4.C.6 Ensure new developments maintain walkable and bikeable roadway networks with appropriate access to transit.					
4.C.7 Support implementation of the Vital Streets Plan.					

GLOSSARY OF TERMS



Area Specific Plan. These plans provide a finer grain of analysis than a city-wide 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.

Board of Zoning Appeals (Zoning Appeals Board). An official board whose principle duties are to hear appeals and, where appropriate, grant variances from the strict application of the zoning ordinance.

Brownfield. Brownfields are abandoned, idled or under-used industrial and commercial facilities where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination. 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 improvements. 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. (APD)

C-D

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.

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 Center. Consolidated service center which brings together staff from Building Inspection, Engineering, Planning, and Zoning to more efficiently and effectively meet the needs of developers, builders and trades people. Located at 1120 Monroe, across the street from the City's water building.

Downtown Development Authority (DDA). A public authority established in 1979 to promote development and fund improvements in Downtown Grand Rapids. Most funds come to the DDA through tax increment financing. Many of the significant improvements completed in downtown over the past 20 years have been completed with the support of the DDA, including Plaza Towers, Grand River Walkways, Monroe Center Improvements, and the Van Andel Arena.

Downtown Improvement District (DID). A Business Improvement District established for Downtown Grand Rapids in October 2000. The DID will provides maintenance & beautification, promotions & communications, special events, and neighborhood development services for Downtown Grand Rapids.

Existing Land Use Classifications.

- **Low Density Residential.** An area designed for housing developed at a density of 1 to 4.9 dwelling units per gross acre.
- **Medium Low Density Residential.** An area designed for housing developed at a density of 5 to 9.9 dwelling units per gross acre.
- **Medium Density Residential.** An area designed for housing developed at a density of 10 to 14.9 dwelling units per gross acre.
- **High Density Residential.** An area designed for housing developed at a density of 15 and more dwelling units per gross acre (14 to 20 units per gross acre desired with 40 units per gross acre the absolute maximum).
- **Commercial.** An area designed for retail business or service establishments that supply commodities or perform services. Any activity involving the sale of goods or services carried out for profit including for example retail shops, restaurant, hotels, entertainment, offices and a arrangement of personal and professional services.
- **Downtown.** The largest, most intensively developed, mixed-use area within the City of Grand Rapids, containing government offices, service uses, professional, cultural, recreational, entertainment, residential, hotel and retail uses.
- **Office.** A sub-category of commercial land use, designed for the conduct of the affairs of a business, profession, service, industry, or government in buildings generally furnished with desk, tables, files and communication equipment.
- **Industrial.** An area designated for the manufacturing, compounding, assemblage or treatment of articles, or materials.
- **Institutional.** An area designed for a for-profit and non-profit, religious or public use, such as a church, library, public or private school or college, hospital, or a government owned or operated building, structure, or land used for public purpose.
- **Mixed Use.** An area designated for the development of a combination of complementary and integrated uses, such as, but not limited to, residential, office, manufacturing, retail, public, or entertainment, in a compact urban form.
- **Traditional Business Area.** Typically located along transit routes, TBA's areas are designated for a mix of civic and retail uses at street level, with apartments and/or offices on the upper floors of multi-story buildings. A TBA generally has structures that are built on the front property line and have shared side walls (or were built with minimal side yard setbacks). The buildings are typically 2 –3 stories in height and sit on relatively narrow lots. Off-street parking is limited or located to the rear of the building. As a result, TBAs created a human-scale and pedestrian-friendly environment where retail, jobs and services are available within easy walking distance from many homes.
- **Parks/Greenspace.** A tract of land, designed and used by the public for active and passive recreation.

F-I

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.

Grandfathered. A use, building or structure which does not conform to the use and/or dimensional standards of the zoning ordinance but which existed prior to the effective date of the ordinance, or amendment thereto. Such use shall be considered a nonconforming use or structure for purposes of the ordinance.

Greenfield. Greenfields are undeveloped properties where new development is proposed or occurring. Typically, greenfield sites are active or idle farmland with limited development restrictions or site constraints that allow for cheaper, quicker development than in a previously developed location.

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.

Historic District. An area or group of areas not necessarily having continuous boundaries, that contains one, or more significant resources that are related by history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture.

Historic Preservation. The identification, evaluation, establishment, and protection of resources significant in history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture.

Historic Resource. A publicly or privately owned building, structure, site, object, feature, or open space that is significant in the history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture of the State, a community, or the United States.

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 put. 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.

Nonconforming Use. A structure or use that is not permitted in the zoning district in which it is located, but which is permitted to continue with restrictions because the structure or use predates the designation of the zone.

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 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.

T-Z

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.

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.

Variance. A departure from the provisions of a zoning ordinance relating to setbacks, side yards, frontage requirements, and lot size that, if applied to a specific lot, would significantly interfere with the use of the property and cause hardship.

Zoning. An important tool used in shaping and forming community growth and redevelopment in a manner consistent with the 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**

