



City of Grand Rapids
Planning Commission
FY22 ANNUAL REPORT



**CITY OF
GRAND
RAPIDS**

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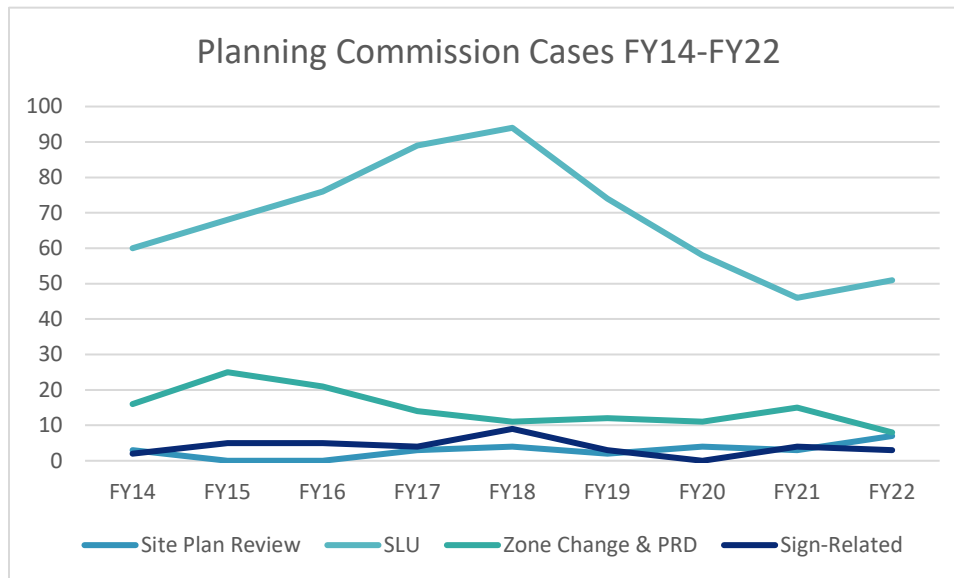
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OVERVIEW

This report provides an overview of the activity of the City of Grand Rapids Planning Department in FY22 (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022). Under the direction of the City Commission, three appointed boards (Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and Historic Preservation Commission), and the City Master Plan, the Planning Department guides public and private development efforts in the City of Grand Rapids.

PLANNING COMMISSION CASES

The volume of cases heard by the Planning Commission has decreased slightly in FY22 compared to the previous year.



Special Land Uses

There were approximately fifty-one (51) Special Land Use (SLU) applications considered by the Planning Commission in FY22. Of these, forty-eight (48) were approved, or approximately 94%. Some of the Special Land Use requests included the following:

- Alcohol Uses: Fourteen (14) SLU applications regarding new or expanded alcohol uses were considered by the Planning Commission.
 - Outdoor Dining Services: Seven (7) of these SLU requests were for outdoor seating with alcohol service.
- Banquet Hall: Two (2) of these SLU requests were for banquet halls.
- Ground Floor Office: In many commercial zone districts, active ground-floor uses are encouraged. As such, office on the ground floor within twenty feet of a front lot line abutting a Neighborhood Business or Urban Center Street requires Special Land Use approval. One (1) SLU application for ground floor office was considered.
- Parking-Related: Four (4) cases for parking as a principal use were considered.
- Density-Related: Ten (10) SLU applications related to increasing density were considered, from two-family to multifamily uses.

Cannabis

On December 28, 2018, the City Commission adopted Zoning Ordinance amendments to allow medical cannabis uses in the City. Subsequent to the City Commission's adoption of this ordinance, additional zoning amendments ("fast-track" amendments) were approved on July 7, 2020 to allow recreational cannabis uses in Grand Rapids. Finally, a last round of zoning amendments that needed further analysis and consideration ("deliberative" amendments) was approved on September 29, 2020 by the City Commission. The Zoning Ordinance now allows cannabis applications to be reviewed either before the Planning Commission or via Planning Director Review, based on the type of use and the Zone District.

In FY22, two (2) Marijuana Special Land Use (MSLU) applications were considered related to establishing marijuana retailers. Both cases were approved.

Sign-Related Requests

Three (3) applications were considered for Planned Sign Programs (Optional Plan Review), digital message centers (Special Land Use), or amendments to previously approved sign packages (Site Plan Review).

Zone Changes

Eight (8) of the cases brought before the Planning Commission were either for rezonings to another zone district or for Planned Redevelopment District rezonings and amendments.

Text Amendments

The Zoning Ordinance is a set of laws that regulates land use within the City of Grand Rapids and endeavors to promote great neighborhoods, vital business districts and a strong economy, and balance with the natural environment. In FY22, the Planning Commission considered one text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance.

Administrative Departures for Infill Development:

- On February 24, 2022, the Planning Commission considered text amendments to the Zoning Ordinance to allow preexisting plats to preserve prior lot dimensions. The proposed text amendments are intended to address lots that have been combined over time, lot lines that have been redistributed, or no longer meet the current lot width requirements due to past text amendments.
- The amendments are specific to infill development of single- and two-family units located on either a vacant lot or a lot that may have additional land available for development.
- The amendments allow an Administrative Departure for the creation of new lots with residential uses and the establishment of vacant lots.
- The amendments would provide the opportunity for additional housing, assist in eliminating the need for dimensional variances for vacant lots, support reinvestment within neighborhoods, and preserve existing structures.

- The Planning Commission recommended the text amendment for City Commission approval and the City Commission adopted the text amendment on April 12, 2022.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS CASES

The Grand Rapids Board of Zoning Appeals considered twelve (12) cases in FY22. Of these, eight (8) cases, or 67% were approved. The approved cases included:

- Dimensional Variances: Seven (7)
- Use Variances: One (1)
- Appeals: None
- Sign: None
- Use & Dimensional: None

PLANNING DEPARTMENT CASELOAD

Below is a table showing both the administrative and legislative permit caseload of Planning Department staff. Additionally, staff reviews building and Land Use Development Services (LUDS) permits, demolition permit applications, lot split/combination applications, and applications for business and alcohol licenses.

<i>Approval Process</i>	<i>Application Type</i>		<i>#</i>
Administrative	Zoning Permits	Accessory Structures	58
		Driveway/Paving	109
		Fence	401
	Administrative Departure		70
	Backyard Chickens		62
	Event/Temporary Use Permit		114
	Sign		249
	Property Use Verification		151
	Director Site Plan Review (mostly alcohol at restaurants, cannabis, and childcare)		17
	Historic Preservation Certificate of Appropriateness **5-10% are referred to the Historic Preservation Commission		313
Board or Commission	Board of Zoning Appeals		12
	Planning Commission	Special Land Use	51
		Marijuana Special Land Use	2
		Planned Sign Program & Amendments	3
		Rezoning & PRD	8

PLANNING PROJECTS

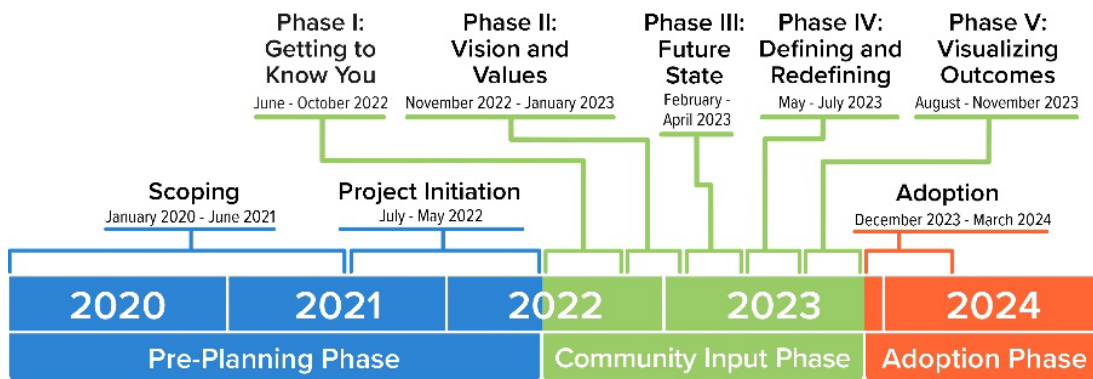
In FY22, the Planning Department worked on a number of long-range planning projects. These include:

Master Plan Updates

The City has begun the process to create a new Community Master Plan (CMP). In 2020, 20 facilitators, hired and paid by the City, hosted a variety of meetings with their communities to review the 2002 Master Plan. This program, part of the pre-planning phase of the CMP, gathered information from the community on the successes of the 2002 Plan and where improvements could be made. From this review, six themes emerged: equity, housing, mobility, safety, environmental justice and health, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. In FY21, City staff created a list of potential CMP Steering Committee members for the Mayor’s review and selection. SC members will support the Planning Commission by guiding the process to create the Community Master Plan.

In FY22, City staff issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for obtaining proposals from professional consulting firms/teams to provide professional and technical expertise for the preparation of the Community Master Plan. The RFP was finalized and released February 11, 2022.

Community Master Plan Timeline



South Division

The South Division Corridor Plan was adopted in 2019 and implementation continued in FY22. This Area Specific Plan covers a 3-mile segment of South Division, stretching from Wealthy Street to 28th Street. A strong concern has emerged about maintaining the culture, people and places that make the neighborhood unique, and leveraging these resources within an equitable development plan. This process will focus on six important themes, including: Meaningful Engagement; Development without Displacement; Economic Opportunity; Transportation; Health, Environment and Quality of Life; and Build and Preserve Community Identity. Work on the Rapid’s Transit-Oriented Development Study was completed during FY21.



In FY22, the focus has been on implementation. Other goals of encouraging transit-oriented development and assisting with Planning Commission item staff reports are ongoing milestones in this project.

Division United

The Division United project, led by The Rapid, collaborated with the cities of Grand Rapids, Kentwood, and Wyoming to create a transportation and development plan for the South Division corridor. The project includes the Rapid's Transit-Oriented Development Study. Multiple stakeholders from neighborhoods, businesses, non-profits, and advocacy groups were involved in the community engagement portion of the project. Key issues that emerged were the need to increase housing choice and employment opportunities, as well as making the Silver Line a convenient transportation option. The project focused on fostering affordable housing, accessible employment, and diverse transportation options along South Division Ave from Wealthy St in Grand Rapids to 60th St in Kentwood. These goals were accomplished by leveraging and building upon the success of the Silver Line Bus Rapid Transit service along South Division Ave. *The Division United project was completed in FY21 and implementation began in FY22.*

Age-Friendly Communities

In the beginning of FY19, the Mayor's Age-Friendly Advisory Council began meeting to identify action steps and oversee the efforts of four work groups: Housing, Transportation, Outdoor Spaces & Buildings, and Communication. The work groups convened August through January, and the goals were delivered to the City Commission in February 2019. In FY21, the city began implementing the Action Steps outlined by the work groups.



In FY22, grant money from AARP was used to purchase and install seven new benches along Plainfield Avenue as part of the plan's ongoing goal of promoting wellness and walkability for individuals with limited mobility.

Southtown

The Southtown Business Area Specific Plan kicked off in the fall of 2017 and focuses on the business districts of Alger Heights, Boston Square, Franklin and Eastern, Madison Square and Seymour Square. The first round of public engagement was held in April 2018, which included a three-day workshop and a community survey. The second round of engagement was held in August of 2018 and featured pop-up workshops in the business districts and meetings geared towards community partners, residents, and business and commercial property

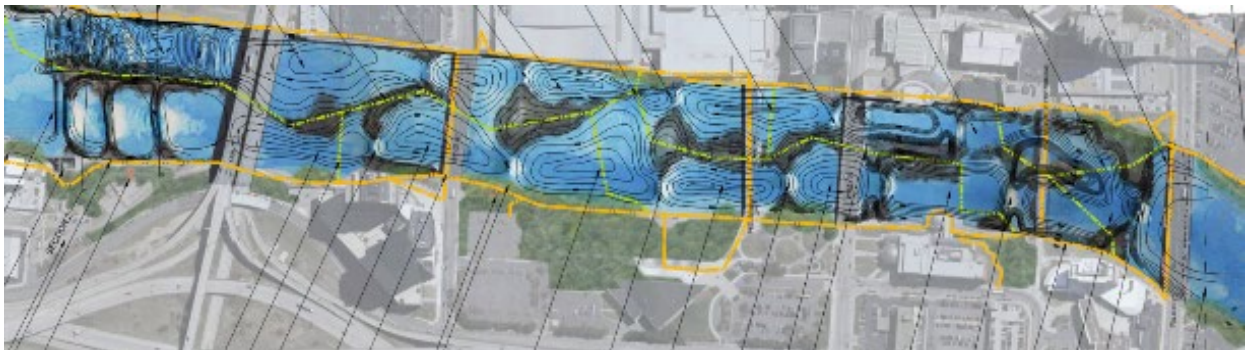


owners. The Southtown Corridor Improvement Authority approved the Southtown Business Area Specific Plan in April 2019. The Planning Commission adopted the Southtown Business Area Specific Plan on December 3, 2020.

Multiple projects from the façade improvement program were completed in FY22. These projects have accomplished improvements to windows, signs, paint, murals, doors, roofs, and other structural elements in the Southtown project area.

Grand River Restoration

Supported by the GR Forward Downtown & River Action Plan of 2015, the Grand River restoration project continued in FY22. The \$43M river restoration initiative will create 9,400 feet of whitewater rapids in the downtown, entailing the removal of five dams between Sixth and Pearl streets to restore an 18-foot elevation change across a 2.2 mile span of the Grand River. A new adjustable hydraulic structure is proposed one mile upstream from the existing 6th Street dam. New riverside parks are also proposed. The restoration will occur in three phases, the first of which, focused between I-196 and Fulton Street, is in the pre-permitting stage with an anticipated completion date of December 2022. The second phase will focus on the construction of an Adjustable Hydraulic Structure (AHS), which is to be completed by December 2023. The final phase, from the AHS to I-196 could be completed as early as 2025.



Important milestones were accomplished in FY22. In March 2022, the State of Michigan passed a \$4.7 billion infrastructure package, \$55 million of which will be granted to Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. (DGRI). DGRI is a nonprofit that was created in partnership with the City of Grand Rapids and oversees the development of the City's downtown urban core. The \$55 million will be used to create and enhance the network of trails along the Grand River. This funding will support plans to build 28 miles of trails along the river and rehabilitate parks in Grand Rapids such as Ah-Nab-Awen Park, Lyon Square, Canal, and Sixth Street parks. This money may also be used to facilitate improvements along the Grand River near 201 Market Ave SW, the site of a major development project to include a 12,000-seat amphitheater, adventure park, apartment towers, and ground-floor retail space.

ZONING VIOLATIONS

Enforced by Code Compliance with the assistance of the Planning Department, the following zoning violations were filed in FY22:

Type	#
Driveway	22
Fence	75
Illegal Business	85
Overcrowding	40
Vehicle Parking	113
Yard Sale	1
Other*	96
Total	432
*Does not include violations of the sign ordinance, which were enforced by the Planning Department	

PLANNING DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

Several changes and improvements for the Planning Department occurred in FY22, including:

- The Planning Department had a new hire in late 2021. Sarah Behmlander was hired as a Planner, and she currently focuses primarily on sign review, development plan review, and counter work. She also assists with preparation and presentation of Planning Commission cases.
- The Planning Department also hired two Planning Interns during the course of FY22. Mallory Prangley interned from September-December 2021 and Catherine Carlberg interned from May-August 2022.
- Board and Commissioner resource pages were maintained to consolidate relevant documents and resources in one place to aid board members in their duties.

STAFF & COMMISSIONER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Planning staff began offering a list of opportunities for training and ongoing development in July 2017. This was done in part to satisfy a strategy that the City proposed as part of its certification as a Redevelopment Ready Community, and in part in response to requests by members of the Planning Commission and City Commission for more such opportunities. This list, typically updated quarterly, included webinars, educational meetings, training programs, and conferences. Due to challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic and limited staff capacity, the list has not been updated in FY22.

In August 2021, City staff, Board of Zoning Appeals members, and Planning Commissioners completed training provided by the Michigan Association of Planning. In the Zoning Board of Appeals session, held on August 19, 2021, participants learned essential information regarding planning and zoning, actors and their roles, the Zoning Board of Appeals, membership, duties, and good meeting practices. In the Planning Commissioner's Toolkit presentation, held on August 26, 2021, Commissioners learned about the history of planning and zoning, the roles and responsibilities of planning commissioners, preparing

and conducting Planning Commission meetings, how to review development proposals, and planning and zoning laws.



PLANNING COMMISSION ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION

About the Board

The City of Grand Rapids Planning Commission works with the Planning Department, the City Commission, and other appointed boards to guide public and private development efforts and carry out the City’s Master Plan. Members seek to administer the Zoning Ordinance fairly and equitably, and to understand citizens’ interests and concerns with respect to development. The City Planning Commission is comprised of nine members who can serve up to three 3-year terms. As of June 30, 2022, the Planning Commission roster was as follows:

Kyle Van Strien, Chairperson	Christopher Germain
Paul Rozeboom, Vice Chairperson	Adrienne Wallace
Laurel Joseph, Secretary	Susan Shannon
Stacie Behler	Lawrence Williams
Kristine Bersche	

Planning Commission Attendance Record – FY22	
Number of Planning Commission Meetings Held	19
Number of Meetings Where Quorum was Affected	0
Average Commissioner Present Rate	87%
Average Commissioner Absent Rate	13%

Enabling Legislation

Chapter 62 of the City Code addresses the Planning Commission. Key components of the ordinance include provisions that:

- Planning Commission members be representative of important segments of the community.
- Bylaws be adopted by the Planning Commission, including conflict of interest provisions.
- Planning Commissioners must vote unless a conflict of interest exists.
- A Planning Commissioner may be removed from office for malfeasance, misfeasance and nonfeasance, following written charges and after a public hearing before the City Commission.
- An annual report be submitted to the City Commission.
- Describe the contents of the Master Plan, detailed procedures for adoption of the Master Plan, and requirement for an update every five years.

Planning Commission Bylaws

Planning Commission bylaws include rules regarding membership, duties, term of office, operating procedures for meetings and public hearings, voting, conflict of interest standards, and removal from the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission bylaws govern the body's operating procedures. The bylaws had last been updated on March 26, 2009 to conform to the Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008. Two amendments to the bylaws were adopted in FY18, including an amendment to institute a more relevant measure of commissioner attendance and an amendment to eliminate the two-year maximum term limit for Planning Commission officers (Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Secretary). No additional amendments to the bylaws were adopted in FY22.