WE ARE GR





July 2026 | Section A

IMPORTANT INFO FROM GRVOTES: 3

YARD WASTE PICKUP AND DROP-OFF: 5

Grand Rapids Starts Long Awaited Dam Removal, Marking Return of the Rapids

When you walk along the Grand River this summer, you may notice something new. On July 1, crews stepped into the water to begin removing four low-head dams between the Bridge Street Bridge and the Fulton Street Bridge. For you and everyone who loves this river, it marks the start of a major phase in the Grand River Restoration — and the long-awaited return of the historic rapids.

This timing isn't random. Work had to begin in July to protect fish during spawning season and to keep invasive sea lampreys from moving past the Sixth Street Dam. The project is designed to protect the ecosystem while improving safety.

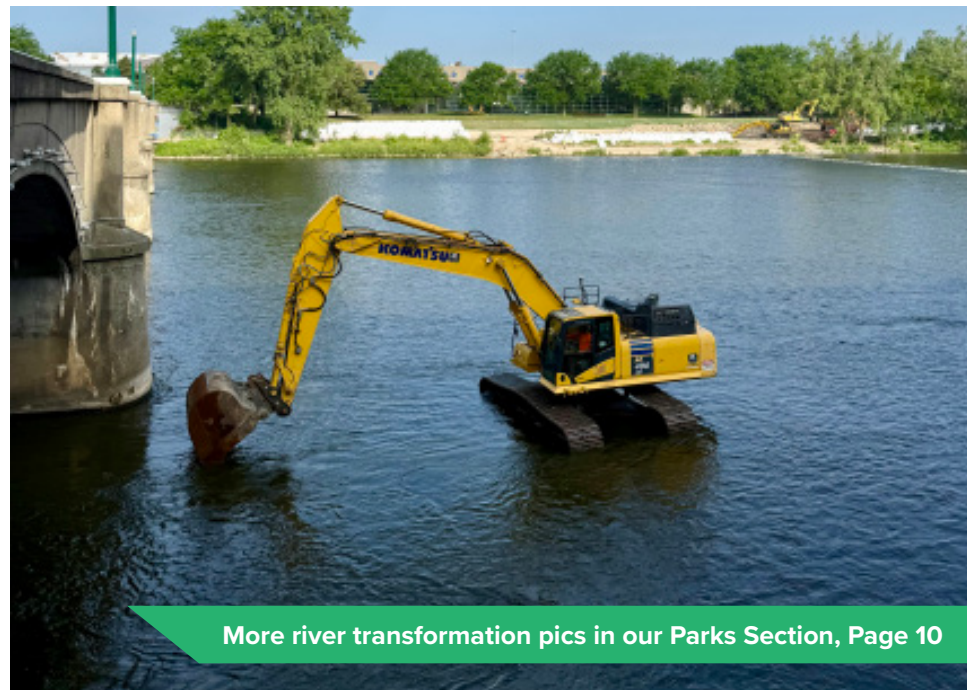
Over the next few weeks, the Taplin Group, the City's contractor, will build temporary causeways so equipment can safely move through the river. They'll also create a small isolation system around part of Dam 2 to build a new boulder arch feature. Other natural riverbed features will be added as water levels allow.

The full dam-removal process will take about two years. When the dams are gone, they'll be replaced with natural structures like boulder arches, riffles and habitat boulders. These features will help fish move more freely, improve safety and bring back the river's natural flow.

Mike Staal, the City's river restoration project manager, said the work is about more than construction. "We're strengthening the connection between our community and the river that runs through the heart of Grand Rapids," he said. He believes the new riverbed will help future generations learn, explore and enjoy the water in ways that haven't been possible for a century.

Matt Chapman, executive director of Grand Rapids Whitewater, said watching equipment enter the river was a powerful moment. "It reflects an 18-year commitment from multiple community partners," he said.

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More river transformation pics in our Parks Section, Page 10

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Growing Stronger Block By Block: Grand Rapids Neighborhoods Power The City's Momentum



Grand Rapids neighbors,

As we wrap up the City's fiscal year, I want to share a brief update on how our community is doing. Many of you have asked about the direction of our city, and I'm proud to say Grand Rapids continues to grow, invest and move forward together.

Over the past several decades, Grand Rapids has transformed into a vibrant, welcoming city. Grand Rapids is now a place where people live, gather, and enjoy arts, culture and entertainment. Our medical corridor, universities, small businesses and major employers continue to strengthen our local economy.

That momentum is still strong. In 2025, the City approved a record $1 billion in construction. Unemployment remains low at 4%, and our population has grown 5.6% over the past decade. Downtown now has more than 2,100 new homes and major public projects — like the amphitheater, soccer stadium, river restoration and park improvements — are shaping a bright future. Our neighborhoods continue to grow and thrive with new streets, housing, parks and community centers.

Tourism is also rebounding. Hotel stays reached 2.36 million nights in 2025, and events like World of Winter and ArtPrize continue to bring millions of visitors and significant economic impact.

We know challenges remain. Storefront vacancies, homelessness, education gaps, housing costs and crime all require continued focus. But we are making progress. Crime has decreased, including a 46% drop in murder victims and a 14.5% drop in property crime in 2024. The Downtown Pathways initiative has helped more than 205 people move into permanent housing with a very low return-to-homelessness rate.

What has always set Grand Rapids apart is not the absence of challenges, but

continued on page 2 ►

Return of the Rapids, continued from page 1

"After years of waiting, the transformation of our river starts today."
What this means for our community

- Dam removal will eliminate dangerous hydraulics and improve safety
- Natural rock features will help restore the river's flow
- Better habitat will support native fish like lake sturgeon
- Stronger ecological resilience will improve the river corridor over 30 acres

When the lower reach is finished — expected by the end of 2027 — you'll see safer public access, new recreation opportunities and a healthier river ecosystem. The project is also expected to boost economic activity along the riverfront.

As a resident, you're watching a once-in-a-generation transformation. The river is becoming a place where you can gather, explore and reconnect with the natural landscape that shaped Grand Rapids.

City Manager's Letter, continued from page 1

our community's ability to solve them — through partnership, philanthropy, entrepreneurship, civic engagement and a shared belief that progress is possible.

That spirit built the hospitals, universities, parks, businesses, cultural institutions and neighborhoods we enjoy today. It continues to guide us as we adapt to new economic and social realities.

Our new City budget reflects our commitment to long term investment in safety, quality of life and strong neighborhoods. It includes funding for police and fire services, economic opportunity, corridor improvements, recycling and refuse operations and major civic projects — all while maintaining a strong Aa2/AA credit rating.

Grand Rapids succeeds because of partnership, accountability and optimism. These values have guided our growth for generations, and they will continue to shape our future.

Thank you for your engagement and your commitment to making Grand Rapids a great place to live. I look forward to the work ahead and to continuing this journey with you.



Celebrate A250 Safely: Know The Rules Before You Light Fireworks

As Grand Rapids joins communities across the country in celebrating America's 250th anniversary, the City is reminding residents to enjoy the season safely and responsibly. With more people expected to mark this milestone year with fireworks, the Grand Rapids Fire and Police Departments are urging everyone to understand the rules and take precautions before lighting up the sky.

The City's fireworks ordinance — aligned with state law — outlines when consumer grade fireworks may be used. Violations carry a $1,000 civil fine per offense, so knowing the permitted times is essential. Fireworks are allowed 11 a.m. to 11:45 p.m. during these windows:

- June 29–July 5
- June 19
- Memorial Day weekend (Saturday & Sunday before)
- Labor Day weekend (Saturday & Sunday before)
- New Year's Eve (11 a.m. Dec. 31–1 a.m. Jan. 1)

Fire Marshal Bill Smith notes that fireworks injure hundreds of people each year — many of them children. To help keep A250 celebrations safe, he encourages residents to follow key safety practices, including:

- Keep water nearby for emergencies
- Never let children handle fireworks — even sparklers burn at extremely high temperatures
- Light fireworks on a flat, clear surface away from homes and flammable materials
- Never relight "duds" — soak them in water instead
- Avoid using fireworks under the influence
- Remember: fireworks are prohibited on public property

Before heading to bed, residents are encouraged to check their yards and shrubbery for any smoldering debris and ensure smoke alarms are working properly.

As Grand Rapids celebrates this historic A250 year, the City encourages everyone to help keep neighborhoods safe, peaceful and enjoyable for all.



Joe Trigg sworn in as Grand Rapids' new police chief

Veteran Grand Rapids Police Department leader Joe Trigg has officially been sworn in as the City's new police chief, following a public Oath of Office ceremony at City Hall on June 29.

Chief Trigg brings more than 25 years of experience with GRPD, having served as interim chief, deputy chief, captain, lieutenant, sergeant and community policing officer. He has also been deeply involved with neighborhood and youth serving organizations across the city.

City Manager Mark Washington said Trigg rose to the top during a transparent, community informed search process.

"Residents made it clear they expect a chief who listens, leads with integrity and understands Grand Rapids," Washington said. "Chief Trigg has demonstrated those qualities time and again."

Trigg said he is honored to continue serving the community he has long called home.

"We will keep focusing on strong training, meaningful partnerships and strategies that reduce harm and build trust," he said. "I believe deeply in this department and in this community."

As chief, Trigg will guide GRPD through ongoing work to strengthen public safety, expand mental health partnerships and deepen community relationships.

GRVOTES

It's a busy year of elections, and your City Clerk wants to make sure you're prepared. Here are important dates and information for each election:

Tuesday, August 4 Partisan Primary Election for federal and state offices – Democratic and Republican candidates are listed on the ballot. You need to select one or the other – can't cross between parties.

Non-Partisan Primary Election for 1st Ward Commissioner. (City Comptroller, 2nd & 3rd Ward Commissioners on November ballot), Grand Rapids Public schools - Sinking Fund Millage proposal.

Tuesday, November 3 General Election – You may vote a straight party or select candidates individually. This ballot includes federal, state, judicial, city and school races as well as proposals.

Proposal 2 of 2022 gives voters more options.

- **Early Voting** - Voters may go to an early voting site to get a ballot, vote and place the ballot in the tabulator during a nine-day period between July 25 and August 2. Hours of operations are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. – Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday. You may also bring your absentee ballot to the EV site to tabulate that ballot.

  Sts Peter and Paul School, 1430 Quarry NW

  GRPS University, 1400 Fuller NE

  Ottawa Hills High School, 2055 Rosewood SE

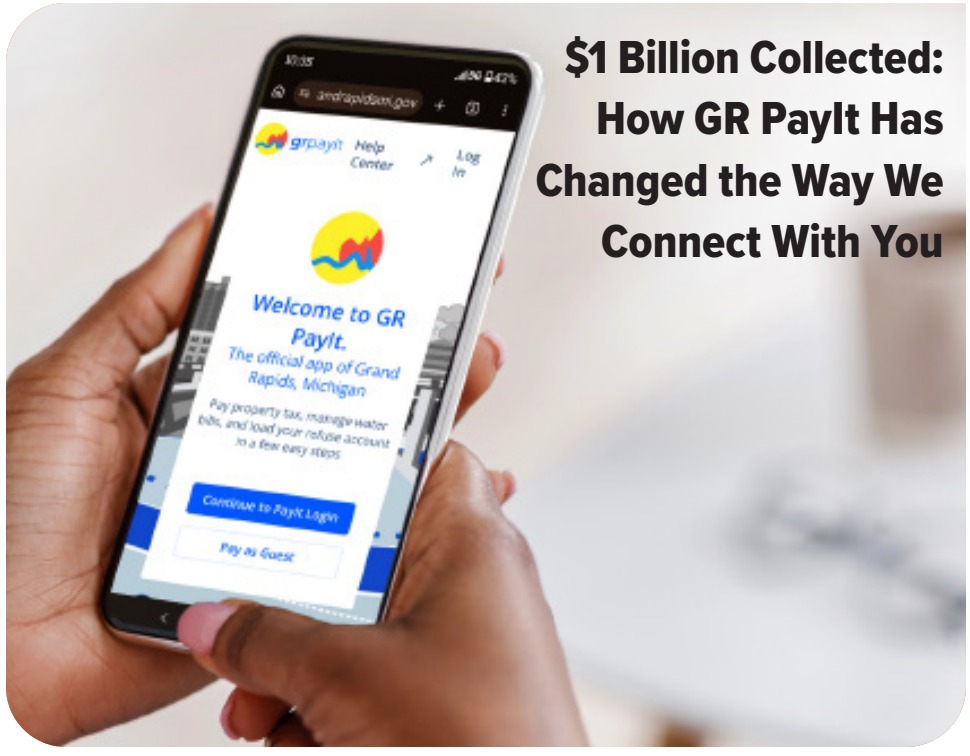
- **Absentee Voting** – Voters may choose to be placed on a Permanent Ballot List. A voter will apply once for all future elections. A voter may still choose to fill out an application for every election.

Some reminders before you head to the polls:

- Absentee voting – All registered voters are eligible to receive an absentee ballot (AV) without a reason. To receive an AV, simply fill out an application before every election. The application is available at grandrapidsmi.gov/Services/Apply-for-an-Absentee-Ballot or in the second-floor City Clerk's Office at City Hall, 300 Monroe Ave. NW, between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Validated parking is available in the Government Center Ramp off Monroe and Ottawa avenues.
- Straight party voting (for November only) – You can vote the partisan section of the ballot by selecting the party only.
- Voter registration – Residents who are 18 or older are automatically registered to vote when they make a transaction with the Secretary of State. You may register to vote by mail up to 15 days before an election and or in person at the City Clerk's Office within 14 days of the election up to Election Day. You need to prove residency in the city.
- Check your voter registration status, register to vote, view a sample ballot or find your polling location at michigan.gov/vote.

Get involved – Become an Election Inspector

- In order to run successful elections, we need help from the community. Election workers are on the frontline of democracy. You will be able to see firsthand how the election process works. Election workers report how rewarding it is to experience the voting process, especially when you see someone vote for the first time. Please check out this website about becoming an election worker.



$1 Billion Collected: How GR PayIt Has Changed the Way We Connect With You

We're excited to share an important milestone: this July, the City of Grand Rapids surpassed $1 billion collected through GR PayIt since launching in 2017.

On August 30, 2017, we partnered with PayIt LLC to introduce GR PayIt, creating a secure, single place for residents to pay bills, manage accounts, receive notifications and access multiple City services. Today, it stands as one of our most successful digital transformation initiatives.

Since launch, electronic payments have grown from $30.7 million in 2017 to nearly $200 million in 2026, and annual transactions have increased from 270,000 to more than 750,000. These trends show residents value convenience—and we've worked hard to deliver it.

Before GR PayIt, paying bills meant navigating multiple websites or visiting City Hall. Now, about 85 percent of payments for water, property taxes, refuse and parking are made electronically. Walk-in payments have dropped by more than 65 percent, reducing wait times and allowing staff to focus on customers who need in-person assistance.

GR PayIt also improves how residents manage accounts. You can schedule payments, sign up for AutoPay, receive reminders, opt into paperless statements and pay parking tickets using QR codes—tools that help prevent missed deadlines and give you more control.

Consolidating payment channels has streamlined administrative processes and allowed us to focus more resources on core services. It also supports sustainability goals by reducing paper use and unnecessary trips to City Hall.

In 2025, the Government Finance Officers Association recognized these efforts with the Award for Excellence in Government Finance. Resident feedback reinforces this success, with surveys showing about 90 percent approval.



A Simpler, More Accessible Way to Connect With the City's Office Of Oversight and Public Accountability

Our Office of Oversight and Public Accountability (OPA) has launched a new online portal that brings six different community pathways into one easy-to-use entry point — making it easier than ever for you to share feedback, request support, or get involved in public safety conversations.

The portal, available at grandrapidsopa.siviltech.com, lets residents submit complaints, compliments, appeals, expungement assistance requests, Community Informed Training proposals, and Know Your Rights workshop requests — all through one streamlined workflow.

OPA partnered with Sivil, a digital forms platform used by cities across the country, to build a system that replaces what used to be a patchwork of forms, emails, and phone calls. Now, every submission goes through a single intake and is automatically routed to the right staff with built-in tracking and deadlines.

Brandon Davis, OPA's managing director, says the new portal reflects the office's commitment to its T.R.U.E. Justice values — Transparency, Responsibility, Unity, Equity and Justice.

"Whether a resident wants to file a complaint, request a workshop, seek expungement assistance or offer a compliment, they can now do it in a way that is simple, consistent and easy to navigate," he said.

What You Can Do Through the New Portal

Residents can now use one form to:

- Recognize positive interactions with public safety staff
- File a complaint about an interaction with police or fire personnel
- Appeal a prior GRPD Internal Affairs decision
- Request expungement help through Project Clean Slate
- Propose Community Informed Training topics
- Request a Know Your Rights workshop for a school, neighborhood, faith community or organization

OPA was created in 2019 to serve as an independent bridge between residents and the City's public safety departments. The office leads programs such as Operation Fresh Start, the Civil Rights Youth Academy, Project Clean Slate, Community Informed Training, and Cure Violence.

The new portal is live now at grandrapidsopa.siviltech.com. Residents can also reach OPA by phone at (616) 456-4672 or email at OPA@grcity.us.





Grow a Greener Grand Rapids: Yard Waste Pickup and Drop-Off Details

The sun is shining, the birds are chirping and plants are growing! This must mean it is yard waste season in Grand Rapids. Curbside yard waste happens every April through the 2nd Friday in December. You can purchase a City of Grand Rapids yard waste cart, a one-time purchase of $30, city yard waste bags or you can purchase green tags to put on any other paper yard waste bag. The green tags and city yard waste bags can be purchased from City Hall and other participating retailers. Residents can also drop off yard waste at no out-of-pocket cost at 2001 Butterworth Street SW.

What are the hours for yard waste drop off site? The yard waste drop off site is open Monday through Saturday from 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM. Come by and remember to bring your proof of city residency.

What CAN I BRING to the yard waste drop off site?

- Grass clippings
- Leaves
- Brush
- Twigs (less than 2 inches in diameter)
- Garden Plants
- Tree Limbs - cut 5' or less; and limbs must be less than 2' diameter
- Logs - cut 5' or less

What can I NOT BRING to the yard waste drop off site? (These are items that conflict with the Organic Materials Review Institute certification of the site)

- Sod
- Dirt
- Stones
- Broken concrete
- Colored mulch
- Trees
- Railroad Ties
- Stumps
- Animal feces and dead animals
- Trash bags or other plastic bags are prohibited
- NOTE: bales of hay are accepted, but the cords or wraps on them are NOT accepted; must cut open the bale at drop off

Remember, City residents will be allowed to pick up to ONE CUBIC YARD of material total each season on a first come basis, for NO OUT OF POCKET COST. Compost and mulch are available for pickup during normal business hours each Saturday. If you would like to purchase more material beyond the no cost one-yard, retail prices are as follows:

WeCare Compost - $32/cubic yard

Wood Chips - $5.50/cubic yard

Spring Soil - $36/cubic yard

Natural Wood Mulch - $9.50/cubic yard

For inquiries on commercial or landscape contractors using this site, please call WeCare Denali directly at 616-685-5164

Not sure if your yard waste is eligible for drop off?

Call 311 or 616-456-3000 to make sure.

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS | Public Works



Studio Days at MLK Help Young People Prepare for College This Summer

Our Community's Children (OCC) is bringing college readiness support directly into the neighborhood this summer through Studio Days at our new MLK Community Center. The program offers young people and their families free help with starting, continuing or completing their college journey.

From June 24 through August 20, OCC staff will be available Wednesdays and Thursdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. for appointments and drop ins. Services include FAFSA assistance, scholarship searches, essay reviews, college success workshops and opportunities to meet college representatives.

OCC Executive Director Shannon L. Harris says the goal is to make college support visible and accessible where young people already are.

"College preparation doesn't stop during the summer, and bringing these services into the neighborhood is our honor," she said.

Fire Department Expands Right to Know Outreach to Strengthen Community Safety

The Grand Rapids Fire Department (GRFD) is leading its second round of outreach to city businesses to ensure full compliance with Michigan's Firefighter Right to Know requirements. This effort is a core part of its mission to protect both our firefighters and the community they serve.

The GRFD recently mailed notices to every business across Grand Rapids. Each envelope includes clear instructions and a QR code that links to a streamlined, mobile friendly reporting form.

Earlier this year, many business owners submitted their information during the department's first phase of outreach, and the department truly appreciates their cooperation. This second mailing focuses on businesses that have not yet responded, giving them another opportunity to meet state requirements.

Under Michigan's Fire Prevention Code, businesses that handle hazardous chemicals must provide the GRFD with a list of the chemicals on-site, their corresponding Safety Data Sheets and information about the amounts and storage locations.

When they have this information on file, our firefighters can respond more effectively and safely during an emergency. Knowing exactly what hazards may be present in a building allows the GRFD to make clearer, faster decisions that protect both lives and property.

Completing the form takes about five minutes. The department designed the process to reduce paperwork and improve accuracy.

Once the information is submitted, the Fire Prevention Division reviews each entry. In some cases, it may contact a business to schedule an on site inspection or provide additional guidance.

This outreach campaign is not only a legal requirement — it is an important partnership between the Fire Department and the business community. By sharing information, we work together to reduce risks and make Grand Rapids safer for everyone.

Grand Rapids Homeowners

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR HOME REPAIRS & LEAD REMEDIATION

616 - 456-3030

Housing Rehabilitation Program

Up to $24,000 for needed repairs such as:
- Roofing
- Furnace and water heater
- Electrical panel upgrade
- Other items as determined upon inspection

Income and occupancy restrictions apply. Balance repaid in monthly installments with matching grant. Secured by a mortgage on the property.

Lead Hazard Control Program

Up to $20,000 per unit to address lead-based paint hazards. Common activities include:
- Window replacement, exterior painting/ siding, interior painting

Income restrictions apply. A child under the age of 6 must reside at the property or visit for childcare. Secured by a mortgage on the property.

BE IN THE KNOW

Sign Up for the Grand Rapids Emergency Alert System

Get notifications regarding tornado warnings, evacuation notices, boil water alerts, severe weather and more!

SCAN ME!

grandrapidsmi.gov/emergencyalerts

Stay connected & follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and X!

@readygrandrapids @readyCityGR



City Asks Residents To Help Shape The Next Generation Of Parks

The Department of Parks and Recreation is asking residents to help decide what the future of parks and recreation should look like over the next five years, launching a citywide planning effort that will guide investments in parks, trails, recreation programs, and public spaces through 2032.

The 2027 Parks & Recreation Strategic Master Plan, now in development, will build on nearly a decade of improvements while identifying new priorities for a growing city. Community feedback collected throughout the summer will directly influence recommendations for future park improvements, recreation programming, and long-term capital investments.

The planning process will evaluate how residents use parks today while identifying opportunities to improve accessibility, strengthen neighborhood connections, and expand recreation opportunities for people of all ages and abilities. The city is also examining how parks can better support climate resilience, sustainable operations, and equitable access across neighborhoods.

Residents are invited to complete an online survey that asks how often they visit parks, which amenities they use most, and what improvements would have the greatest impact on their neighborhoods. Survey participants are also asked to rank priorities such as well-maintained parks, connected trail systems, river access, environmental stewardship, and more. It also asks residents about barriers that may prevent them from using parks including transportation, accessibility, cost, safety concerns, and lack of awareness about available programs.

Beyond the online survey, the department plans to gather feedback through neighborhood pop-up events, focus groups with youth and older adults, poolside engagement events, and more, all designed to reach residents where they already gather. The department's goal is to ensure the final plan reflects voices from every corner of the city.

The updated master plan will build on work completed since the first master plan was adopted in 2017 and updated in 2022. During that time, Grand Rapids has invested in neighborhood parks, expanded recreation opportunities, improved accessibility, strengthened park maintenance, and continued implementing projects funded through the voter-approved Parks Millage.



For additional information regarding upcoming master plan engagement events and opportunities, please like and follow GR Parks and Rec on Facebook (@GRParksandRec). Engagement updates on the 2027 Master Plan are available at: https://engage.grandrapidsmi.gov/grparks2027



Join GR Parks and Rec for free outdoor fitness classes at parks around Grand Rapids this summer! The Free Outdoor Summer Fitness Series is made possible thanks to partnership with Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc. and Priority Health. Classes may be photographed for promotional purposes.

POUND @ Lyon Square

Dates: Mondays through Aug. 17
Time: 5:30 – 6:15 p.m.
Equipment: water
Address: 296 Lyon St. NW

Yoga @ Mulick Park

Dates: Mondays through Aug. 17
Time: 6 – 6:45 p.m.
Equipment: mat, towel, water
Address: 1632 Sylvan Ave SE

Zumba @ Rosa Parks Cicle

Dates: Mondays through Aug. 17
Time: 6:30 – 7:15 p.m.
Equipment: water
Address: 135 Monroe Center St NW

Line Dancing @ MLK Park Tennis Court

Dates: Mondays through Aug. 17
Time: 7 – 7:45 p.m.
Equipment: water
Address: 900 Fuller Ave SE

Barre @ The Blue Bridge

Dates: Tuesdays through Aug. 18
Time: 5:30 – 6:15 p.m.
Equipment: mat, towel, water
Address: The Blue Bridge spans the Grand River between Fulton St. and Pearl St. bridges

HIGH Fitness @ Briggs Park Tennis Court

Dates: Tuesdays through Aug. 18
Time: 6 – 6:45 p.m.
Equipment: water
Address: 324 Knapp St. NE

Glute Aerobics @ 555 Monroe

Dates: Tuesdays through Aug. 18
Time: 6:30 – 7:15 p.m.
Equipment: mat, towel, water
Address: 555 Monroe Ave

Sunset Yoga @ Lookout Park

Dates: Tuesdays through Aug. 18
Time: 7 – 7:45 p.m.
Equipment: mat, towel, water
Address: 801 Fairview Ave NE

Circuit Training @ Ottawa Hills Fitness Court

Dates: Wednesdays through Aug. 19
Time: 10:30 – 11:15 a.m.
Equipment: mat, towel, water
Address: 2060 Oakfield Ave SE

Pumped Up Strength @ Cherry Park

Dates: Wednesdays through Aug. 19
Time: 5:30 – 6:15 p.m.
Equipment: mat, towel, water; a set of 5-10 lb. dumbbells is optional
Address: 725 Cherry St SE

Total Body Power @ Roosevelt Park

Dates: Wednesdays through Aug. 19
Time: 6:30 – 7:15 p.m.
Equipment: mat, towel, water
Address: 739 Van Raalte Dr SW

WERQ @ Highland Park

Dates: Wednesdays through Aug. 19
Time: 7 – 7:45 p.m.
Equipment: water
Address: 700 College Ave NE

Sunrise Yoga @ Indian Trails Golf Course

Dates: Thursdays through Aug. 20
Time: 6:30 – 7:15 a.m.
Equipment: mat, towel, water
Address: 2776 Kalamazoo Ave SE

Mat Pilates @ Riverside Park

Dates: Thursdays through Aug. 20
Time: 10:30 – 11:15 a.m.
Equipment: mat, towel, water
Address: Bandshell entrace to the park

Hip Hop Barre @ Pleasant Park

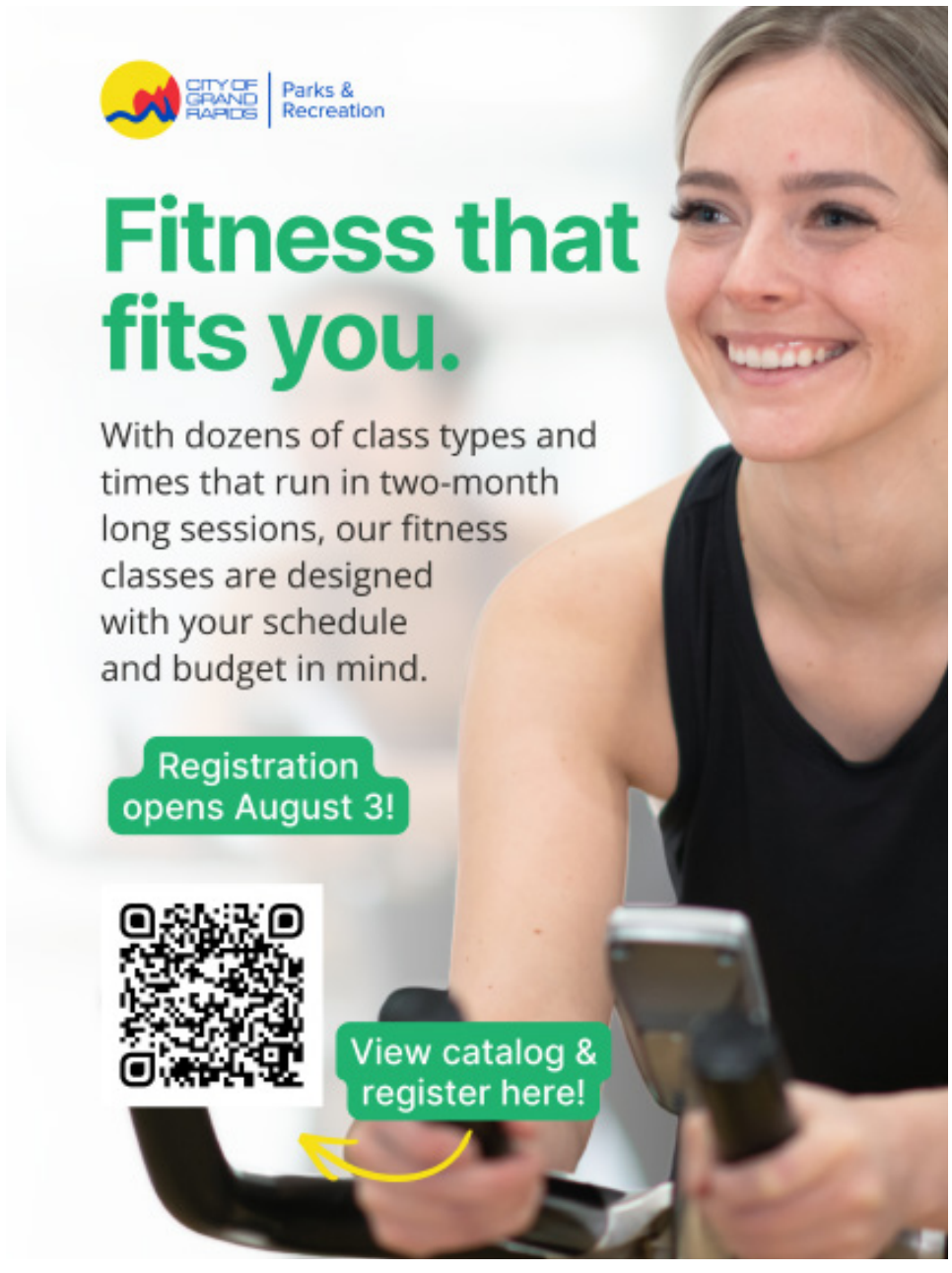
Dates: Thursdays through Aug. 20
Time: 5:30 – 6:15 p.m.
Equipment: mat, towel, water
Address: 630 Madison Ave SE

TurnUP Dance Fitness @ Garfield Park Futsal Court

Dates: Thursdays through Aug. 20
Time: 6:30 – 7:15 p.m.
Equipment: water
Address: 2111 Madison Ave SE

For additional class information and cancellations, please like and follow GR Parks and Rec on Facebook (@GRParksandRec). Class descriptions are available at grparks.info/outdoorfitness. Cancellations will also be posted to the cancellation hotline at 616-456-3699.


STAY COOL
WITH GR PARKS & REC
ALL SUMMER LONG
3 Pools • 15 Splash Pads •
Weekend Kayak Rentals @ Riverside Park
Learn more at: grandrapidsmi.gov/recreation


CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS | Parks & Recreation
Fitness that fits you.
With dozens of class types and times that run in two-month long sessions, our fitness classes are designed with your schedule and budget in mind.
Registration opens August 3!
View catalog & register here!


CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS | Parks & Recreation
MLK PARK COMMUNITY CENTER
900 Fuller Ave SE
MLK Park Community Center offers year-round recreation and program activities for all ages, seven days a week. Paid and free opportunities available.
View hours, programs, and more:
grparks.info/mlkcenter
MLK PARK COMMUNITY CENTER

The Changing Shape of the Grand River

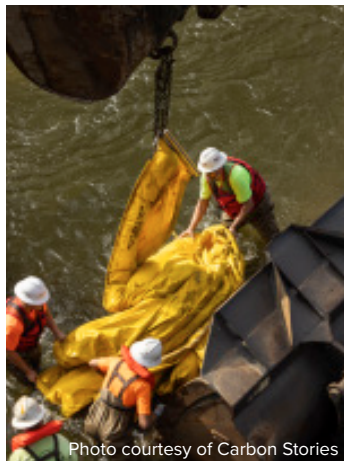
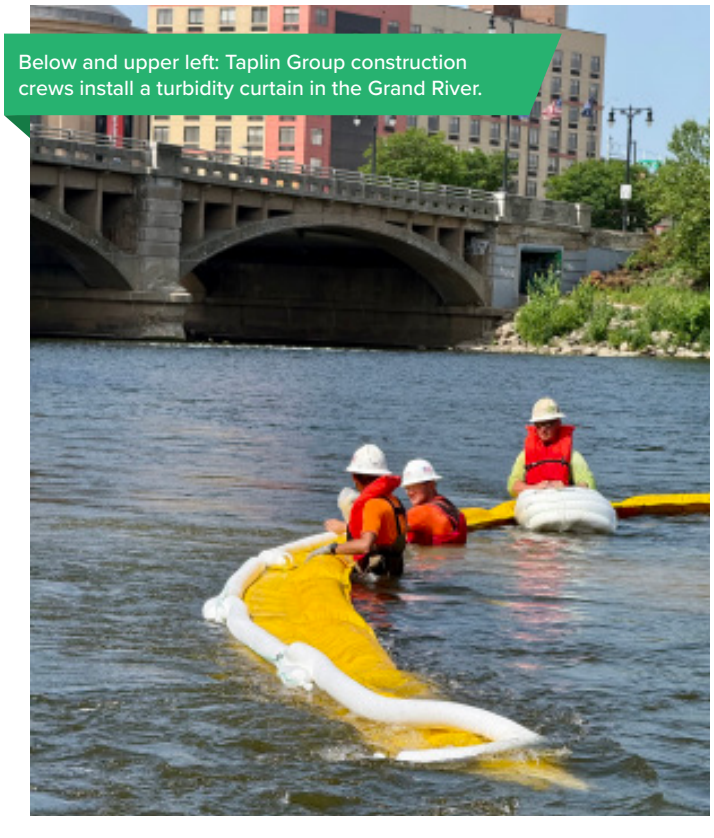
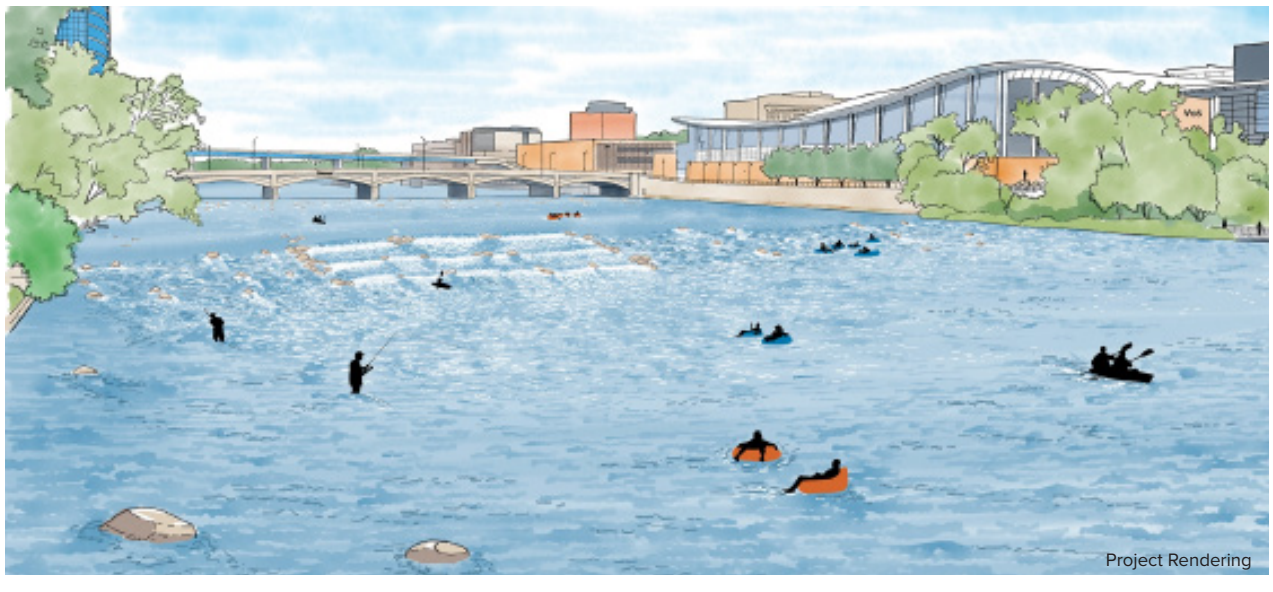

Photo courtesy of Carbon Stories


Photo courtesy of Carbon Stories




Below and upper left: Taplin Group construction crews install a turbidity curtain in the Grand River.


Project Rendering

Stay tuned to WeAreGR for more updates as work continues. Visit the river project website by scanning the code here.

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WE ARE GR



11
My Choice for EXPLORATION
ENROLL TODAY!
ENROLL.GRPS.ORG
GRPS my choice
Questions?
616.819.2150
Enrollment@grps.org

July 2026 | Vol. 24 | Issue 3 | Section B

GRPS Sinking Fund Millage Proposal on August 4 Ballot

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Grand Rapids voters will weigh in on a sinking fund millage for Grand Rapids Public Schools in the August 4 election.

A sinking fund is a limited property tax used to fund building maintenance, infrastructure, and technology projects on a "pay-as-you-go" basis. Sinking funds are primarily used for major repairs, renovations, and construction of school buildings, as well as technology upgrades and school security improvements. Unlike bonds, a sinking fund does not create debt or incur interest. The tax is collected annually, and the revenue is specifically allocated for facility repairs and upgrades. All funds are publicly reported on the district's website, and an independent audit is conducted annually by the state to ensure transparency and accountability.

Many neighboring districts, including Kentwood, East Grand Rapids, Godwin Heights, Grandville, and Wyoming, have or have recently had sinking funds. In 2011, taxpayers approved a 1.0 mill sinking fund for five years for GRPS, which expired at the end of 2016.

The current 0.95 millage proposal would cost a homeowner with a $300,000 market value and a $150,000 taxable value approximately $142.50 annually, $11.88 monthly, or $0.39 daily. Funding would focus on facility needs such as repairing roofs, updating plumbing, and ensuring HVAC systems and windows are efficient. If approved, this proposal is expected to generate approximately $7 million annually for the district.

Currently, GRPS has a total millage debt rate of 3.85, ranking 24th out of 27 school districts in Kent County. If approved, 20 other school districts would still have a higher millage debt rate than GRPS.

If you would like to participate in the August 4 election, here are your options:

Vote by Mail

If you are a registered Michigan voter, you may request an absentee ballot without providing a reason using either of the methods outlined below:

- Online (requires personal ID and signature upload) — until 5 p.m. the Friday before Election Day.
- By mail — must be received by your local clerk by 5 p.m. the Friday before Election Day; it is recommended to mail at least 15 days early.

Vote in Person

Go to your polling location — find your polling location by visiting michigan.gov/vote.

For more information, please visit grpsmillage.com.



Two GRPS Seniors Awarded Prestigious, Full-Ride Gates Scholarship



Two Grand Rapids Public Schools seniors have been awarded The Gates Scholarship, a highly selective, last-dollar scholarship that covers the full cost of college.

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Nkechinyere Okwuwasi, a senior at City High Middle School, and Jose Garcia-Vicente, a senior at Union High School, were selected for the prestigious honor. They are among just 1% of more than 61,000 applicants nationwide chosen for the scholarship.

"I was super excited," Okwuwasi said about finding out she was a recipient. "I was in disbelief because I didn't even think I would get this far. I immediately told my mom and my god mom and we were all screaming about it and just really excited because it is a full-ride scholarship."

Garcia-Vicente said he had a hunch during his finalist interview that he might be selected.

"It felt unreal, but the thing is I had a feeling. I was sort of confident that I would win because my conversation with the person that was interviewing me felt very smooth," he said.

Garcia-Vicente will attend Michigan

Continued on page 12 ►



Aberdeen Elementary School currently under construction

Four School Names Announced to Create Greater Unity and Honor Historic Names

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- The Grand Rapids Board of Education approved names for four schools as part of the Reimagine GRPS initiative, strengthening school identities, creating greater unity within school communities, and honoring the rich histories that have shaped generations of scholars.

Aberdeen Elementary School

Our new northeast elementary school, scheduled to open in August 2027, will be named Aberdeen Elementary School. The school is being built behind the current Aberdeen Academy and will become the new home of Aberdeen Academy and Palmer Elementary. It will be the first new school built in northeast Grand Rapids in more than 60 years.

The name was selected through a community-led process that began in October, when 137 name ideas were submitted by our community. A group of Aberdeen Academy and Palmer Elementary families and staff reviewed those names and chose six finalists to move forward to a public vote. Aberdeen Elementary consistently rose to the top, ranking in the top two during both the name submission period and the public vote.

After discussion, the Board of Education determined it was important to honor the century-long legacy of learning associated with the Aberdeen name.

Construction continues to make significant progress. Community members can follow updates through the Reimagine Dashboard.

Alger Elementary School

When Brookside Elementary School relocates to the former Alger Middle School building for the 2027-28 school year, the school will be named Alger Elementary School.

The name reflects the building's long history as Alger Elementary School, which served elementary scholars for 80 years before becoming a middle school. It also strengthens the connection between the school and the Alger Heights neighborhood it has long served.

Renovations are underway to transform the building into a modern elementary learning environment, including two new playgrounds, additional restrooms, new gathering spaces, and improved air conditioning.

Innovation Central Middle School and Ottawa Hills Middle School

As part of the Reimagine GRPS initiative, middle school programs are being aligned more closely with their high school communities. Riverside Middle School joined the Innovation Central campus last year, and Alger Middle School will join the Ottawa Hills campus this fall.

Beginning this school year, the middle school programs will be known as Innovation Central Middle School and Ottawa Hills Middle School. These names create a seamless identity across grades 6-12 while honoring two of the district's most recognizable and historic school communities.

By sharing a common name, scholars and families will experience a stronger sense of connection as they move through their educational journey, while preserving the traditions and pride associated with each school community.

These naming decisions reflect the district's commitment to honoring the past while building for the future. As these transitions take place, they will help create stronger, more connected school communities that celebrate their history while preparing the next generation of scholars for success.

► Gates Scholarship, continued from page 11

State University to study engineering, while Okwuwasi will attend Barnard College of Columbia University to study neuroscience.

"It takes away the financial burden that comes with going to college," Okwuwasi said. "I was always kind of scared that finances would be something that would be a really big barrier. Having this scholarship makes me feel like anything is possible."

"It's a huge relief. It takes the burden off not just me, but also my mom," Garcia-Vicente added.

Okwuwasi would like to become a neurosurgeon. Garcia-Vicente is interested in becoming an electrical engineer.

Each year, The Gates Scholarship is awarded to exceptional student leaders, with the intent of helping them realize their maximum potential. Scholars will receive funding for the full cost of attendance that is not already covered by other financial aid and the Student Aid Index, as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), or the methodology used by a Scholar's college or university.

Grand Rapids Public Schools
WE ARE GR
July 2026
Grand Rapids Board of Education

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Equal Opportunity Institution: Grand Rapids Public Schools, as an Equal Opportunity Institution, complies with federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and harassment, including Title IV and Title VII (with amendments) of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Title IX of the Educational Amendment of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Veterans Readjustment Act of 1974 as amended 38 USC 20-12 and the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990. The District will not discriminate against any person based on race, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and expression, height, weight, color, religion, national origin, age, marital status, pregnancy, disability or veteran status. The District's Civil Rights Compliance Officer is Thomas Cottle. Mr. Cottle may be contacted at 1331 Martin Luther King Jr. St SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49501, (616) 819-2030 or (616) 819-2028. The District's Title IX Coordinator is Thomas Cottle. Mr. Cottle may be contacted at 1331 Martin Luther King Jr. St SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49501 or (616) 819-6339 or titleix@grps.org.

Title IX Annual Athletics Compliance Report: Grand Rapids Public Schools is committed to securing athletic equity and provides annual Title IX reporting to the athletes and parents in an effort to bring increased attention and resources towards ensuring that gender equity as required by Title IX of the Education Amendments for 1972, Grand Rapids Public Schools annual report is available at www.grps.org.

To comply with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), parents may request information regarding the professional qualifications of the student's classroom teachers.

Please contact Michelle Dexter, Director of Human Resources, in Human Resources via email atwoodc@grps.org or at (616) 819-2095.

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Powering the Future: GRPS Unveils First Electric Buses

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – The first electric school buses in the history of Grand Rapids Public Schools are now on the road.

GRPS, in partnership with Dean Transportation, is adding 15 electric buses to its fleet, along with the necessary charging infrastructure. The project was funded through a $5.2 million grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and a $1.5 million grant from the State of Michigan.

Charging infrastructure has been installed to support all 15 buses. The first seven buses are now in service, with eight additional buses expected to join the fleet soon.

"This is exactly what we mean when we say Reimagine GRPS," said GRPS Superintendent Dr. Leadriane Roby. "This is progress. This is partnership. And most importantly, this is about creating better opportunities and safer experiences for our scholars every day."

"When I see these buses parked here today, I see a school district leading by example," said Grand Rapids Board of Education Vice President Aarie Wade. "I see a commitment to doing what's right for our scholars, our community, and our future."

Dean Transportation applied for the grants on behalf of GRPS and coordinated the installation of the charging infrastructure.

"This achievement reflects a shared commitment to innovation, sustainability, and a focus on providing safe and reliable student transportation throughout GRPS," said Dean Transportation President Patrick Dean. "Today is a proud moment for everyone. It's a strong example of what can happen when we work together with a shared vision."

GRPS and Dean Transportation would like to thank the many partners who helped make this project a reality, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Michigan Department of Education, Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, Michigan Association of Pupil Transportation, Consumers Energy, and Hoekstra Transportation.



ENROLL TODAY!

We proudly offer **No-Cost**, High-Quality PreK for All

Enrollment for PreK for All is now open for the 2026-2027 school year.

APPLY NOW TO SECURE YOUR SPOT!

Open to children who will be 4 by December 1, 2026.

Thanks for Michigan's PreK for All program, PreK is available at **NO-COST** to ALL families in Grand Rapids Public Schools. Our GSRP Preschool Offers:

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Research shows participation in a quality PreK program improves a child's emotional, social and intellectual skills and helps ensure they are healthy and ready for kindergarten.



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SCAN TO ENROLL

Visit preschool.kentisd.org or call (616) 819-2111 for more info.

These materials were developed under a grant from the State of Michigan's Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential.

***NEW Tuition-Free PreK Classrooms**

at Central Station Early Childhood Center

the rapid

ABESTOS NOTICE

Asbestos is a general name for a group of naturally occurring minerals composed of small fibers. These fibers are very strong and resistant to heat and chemicals. The mere presence of asbestos in a building does not mean that the health of the building occupants is endangered. When left intact and undisturbed, asbestos-containing materials do not pose a health risk to building occupants. There is, however, the potential for exposure when the material becomes damaged or disturbed. Because of these problems associated with asbestos exposure, the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Act, or AHERA emphasizes that asbestos in school buildings must appropriately be managed.

The Grand Rapids Public Schools has an asbestos management plan that addresses contact persons, training, inspections, response actions, operation and maintenance activities, periodic surveillance, cleaning, disclosure efforts, and school building areas containing asbestos. Any person may review the management plan at the Grand Rapids Public School's Facilities Management Department, 900 Union, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503, during regular business house (8:00 am to 4:00 pm). Alternatively, any person may request a copy of the plan by writing the Grand Rapids Public Schools Facilities Management Department, 900 Union, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503. There is a cost involved in reproducing the document of approximately 10 cents per page. The Grand Rapids Public Schools will send a copy out of the management plan within 5 business days of receiving the request.

Alexander and Stocking Buildings Poised to Serve Communities in New Ways

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- The Grand Rapids Board of Education has approved moving forward with the sale of the former Alexander and Stocking school sites to developers planning projects that will bring housing, childcare and community services to our neighborhoods.

The board voted to move forward with the sale of the former Alexander school, located at 1010 Alexander St. SE, to Cross Contracting LLC. Cross Contracting proposed purchasing the Alexander site for $1 million and transforming it into a mixed-use community development. Plans include the adaptive reuse of the existing building for childcare, youth programming and nonprofit or community-serving organizations, along with residential housing. Alexander closed as a school in 2010.

The board also approved moving forward with the sale of the former Stocking school, located at 863 Seventh St. NW, to Commonwealth Development Corporation. Commonwealth Development Corporation proposed purchasing the site for $1 million and redeveloping it into affordable multifamily housing, community space, and health center. Stocking closed as a school in 2024.

As part of the Reimagine GRPS with Us! initiative, the district committed to identifying new uses for former school properties that provide long-term value to the community. Neighborhood meetings held in January helped shape the requests for proposals and evaluation criteria used to review submissions.

GRPS received seven proposals across the two sites. Following review, the top two proposals for each property advanced to interviews before being presented to the Board of Education for final consideration.

"We would like to thank all of the organizations that took the time to submit proposals for our former school sites," said Superintendent Dr. Leadriane Roby. "Throughout the evaluation process, two submissions at each site consistently emerged as the strongest candidates. We look forward to seeing these projects become a reality and contribute lasting value to our community."

"The projects selected will transform these former school sites into new opportunities for the families our schools have long supported."

– *José Rodriguez*
Board of Education President

"I want to thank my board colleagues for their diligent work throughout this pilot process," said Board of Education President José Rodriguez. "The proposals we received reflect exactly the kind of vision we hoped to see - creative ideas that will strengthen our neighborhoods and serve our community for years to come. The projects selected will transform these former school sites into new opportunities for the families our schools have long supported."

GRPS has partnered with real estate experts at JLL to serve as the district's owner's representative.





Groundbreaking New Center will Increase Access to Quality, Affordable Childcare

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids Public Schools, Head Start for Kent County, Rapid Transit Authority and Pure Architects unveiled the first-of-its-kind Central Station Early Childhood Center in Grand Rapids. This center is among the first early-care facilities in the nation located inside a public transit hub, reimagining an underutilized space into an indoor and outdoor educational and play area, with the goal of making quality, affordable childcare accessible to families close to where they live and work.

"What was once an underutilized public asset has turned into a true community space that benefits children, families and the broader community."

– *Tracie Coffman,*
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Current barriers, including cost, distance and lack of transportation, prevent families from accessing necessary early care and education for their children. As a result, the Grand Rapids area needs more than 7,000 childcare slots. The Central Station Early Childhood Center will help to change that, creating a space that enables families to access the support they need.

"Grand Rapids families need access to quality care and education for their children in order to thrive. Thanks to the collaboration, resources and expertise of our partners, we have made innovative use of public space that can work for the public good. What was once an underutilized public asset has turned into a true community space that benefits children, families and the broader community. We're so proud to be unveiling this center today and we look forward to the positive difference it will make in so many lives," said Tracie Coffman, program officer, W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The Central Station Early Childhood Center will expand access to affordable, quality early care and education to 100 children from infancy to preschool, welcoming its first classes in September 2026.

"What the team has done here could not be accomplished by any one organization alone," said Scott Lewis, president and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids. "Today is an opportunity to celebrate collaboration among transit leaders, government, educators, philanthropy and community advocates, because together, pooling resources and areas of expertise, we have reinvented how to approach the change we wish to see in our communities."

The Grand Rapids Central Station Early Childhood Center will open in September in downtown Grand Rapids. For more information on the center, visit: www.grymca.org/central-station-child-care.



900 GRPS 8th Graders Learn On The Water During 'The Grand Canoe Experience'

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. -- The City of Grand Rapids and Grand Rapids Public Schools partnered together create The Grand Canoe Experience, a locally led outdoor initiative that gave more than 900 GRPS eighth-graders the opportunity to canoe at Riverside Park.

"We're excited for another great year of helping Grand Rapids kids learn more about the outdoors," said Sam Truby who leads GR Outside, an outdoor education focused division within the City's parks and recreation department. "The Grand River is a big piece of our City and this is a unique opportunity for kids to experience the river in a new way."

This is the eighth year the City and GRPS have partnered to provide outdoor learning experiences for students and the second year the program has been led entirely by local partners.

"For many of our scholars, this is their first opportunity to experience our waterways from the seat of a canoe," said GRPS Superintendent Dr. Leadriane Roby. "It's a powerful extension of learning beyond the classroom, where they can connect directly with the natural resources that surround our community and better understand their importance. I'm grateful to the City of Grand Rapids for their continued partnership in making this experience possible for our young people."

Throughout the week, GRPS students engaged in several outdoor activities, including paddling nine-passenger canoes, learning about invasive species and native planting and wetland restoration, boat building, macro and mussel identification, and more. Community partners including Camp Newaygo, Friends of Grand Rapids Parks, Grand Rapids Public Museum, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc., John Ball Zoo, Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds (LGROW), Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' Environmental Health Bureau, and the City's sustainability and water departments will provide land-based education opportunities.



"The Grand River is a big piece of our City and this is a unique opportunity for kids to experience the river in a new way."

– Sam Truby, City of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation

"We see a variety of approaches to K-12 outdoor education. Grand Rapids Public Schools and GR Outside are some of the most innovative partners we work with. Our team now looks forward to bringing their expertise in teaching youth outside to this capstone experience each May," said Jalisa Danhof, Camp Newaygo Director.



Honoring 40 Years of Dedication to GRPS Scholars and Families

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Grand Rapids Public Schools is proud to celebrate four employees who have reached the remarkable milestone of 40 years of service to our scholars, families, and community.

Teachers Christine Black, Barbara Dodge, and Renee Lance, along with Public Safety Lt. Christina Johnson, were honored during the June Board of Education meeting for their extraordinary dedication and lasting contributions to GRPS.

Christine Black is a kindergarten teacher at Kent Hills Elementary School, where she has served since 2008. She began her career with GRPS as a special education teacher and has worked in several schools across the district. During the board meeting, she thanked her colleagues and family for their support throughout her career.

"Thank you to my family, without them I wouldn't be here," Black said. "I love what I do and I do what I love."

Barbara Dodge is a kindergarten teacher at Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Academy. Over the course of her four decades with GRPS, she has served scholars at multiple schools throughout the district.

"I want to thank God because he is the reason I am here. He blessed me with the ability to take part in what his plan was," Dodge said.

Renee Lance is a special education teacher at Aberdeen Academy. During her 40 years with GRPS, she has served in several schools and helped mentor fellow educators.

"It has been a privilege," Lance told attendees.

Christina Johnson is a lieutenant with GRPS Public Safety and School Security. She began her career with the district as a security officer and has also served in training and compliance roles. During the celebration, she shared her commitment to continuing her service to the GRPS community.

"If the Lord is willing, I plan to be here another 40 years because what I do I love - and that's putting our kids, our families, and our staff first," Lt. Johnson said.

Together, these four dedicated employees represent 160 years of service at GRPS. Their commitment has touched countless lives and helped make GRPS a stronger community for generations of scholars and families.









CELEBRATING THE CLASS OF 2026

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Grand Rapids Public Schools is proud to celebrate the Class of 2026 as graduates take their next steps toward bright and promising futures.

Graduates were honored during nine commencement ceremonies. During commencement ceremonies, Superintendent Dr. Leadriane Roby reminded scholars of the unique strengths they developed during their time at GRPS.

"You learned alongside classmates from different cultures, backgrounds, languages, and life experiences," Dr. Roby said. "That is a strength and a gift. And in today's world, it is a superpower. Lean into it. Use it to build bridges. Use it to lead with empathy. Use it to help change the world for the better."

Among this year's accomplishments, 103 graduates earned the State of Michigan Seal of Biliteracy, demonstrating high levels of proficiency in two or more languages.









Brooke Bevins



John Uzarski

Two GRPS Educators Honored with Groundswell Awards

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Two educators from Grand Rapids Public Schools have been recognized by the Groundswell Stewardship Initiative for their leadership in environmental stewardship and outdoor learning.

Brooke Bevins, a ninth-grade biology teacher at Ottawa Hills High School, received the 2026 Sprout Teacher of the Year Award. The award honors educators who have worked with the organization for fewer than three years.

Bevins was recognized for engaging scholars in outdoor learning and stewardship projects. She recently completed her second full Groundswell project and has become a champion for the program within GRPS.

Her scholar-led project focuses on beautifying an outdoor campus space by adding native plants to the school courtyard and creating outdoor learning opportunities alongside nearby middle school scholars.

Joe Uzarski of Grand Rapids Montessori Academy received the inaugural 2026 Rooted in Service Award.

Uzarski, who is retiring after 26 years in education, has partnered with Groundswell for more than 13 years. He is a dedicated environmental steward who inspires scholars through place-based learning experiences and stewardship projects.

His commitment extends beyond the classroom, including hauling cafeteria compost to his home and encouraging scholars and colleagues to care for the environment.

Groundswell created the Rooted in Service Award to recognize educators who have made a lasting impact through environmental education and stewardship.



Board of Education Approves 2026-27 GRPS Budget

Grand Rapids, Mich. (GRPS) -- The Grand Rapids Board of Education approved the 2026–27 budget on Monday, making strategic investments in educators, curriculum, bilingual resources, and opportunities for scholars while continuing efforts to reduce expenses.

Total expenses are budgeted at $281 million, a $7 million decrease from the previous school year. Even as overall spending is reduced, the budget contains investments that will directly impact scholars.

The budget includes investments in a new science curriculum and training to support inquiry-based practices as part of the OpenSciEd adoption, new bilingual and English Language Arts resources and training opportunities to support implementation of the Science of Reading, and additional dual enrollment opportunities as scholar participation continues to grow.

As the district works to improve financial sustainability, there are reductions being made. This includes the elimination of one Chief Area Instructional Leader Cabinet position and the closure of the Office of the Ombuds. Districtwide schools have worked to align staffing levels with current enrollment, leading to a reduction of some positions. The district is working to find new positions for displaced staff by filling vacancies. The district will also cut expenses by limiting cell phone stipends and maintaining a freeze on out-of-state travel unless it is funded through external sources.

"This budget reflects our commitment to making fiscally responsible decisions that preserve the long-term stability of Grand Rapids Public Schools while continuing to invest in our scholars and staff," said Superintendent Dr. Leadriane Roby. "We have made difficult but strategic choices that prioritize equity and sustainability. We are ensuring that GRPS remains well-positioned to support scholar success now and in the future."



Beyond Free Tuition: The Grand Rapids Promise Zone Supports Students Every Step of the Way



Photo courtesy of Steve Jessmore

Grand Rapids, Mich. (GRCC) -- For many students and families, the idea of college can feel both exciting and overwhelming. Questions about cost, applications, and what comes next after high school can create uncertainty – even for students who are fully capable of succeeding.

In Grand Rapids, one program is working to remove those barriers entirely.

The Grand Rapids Promise Zone is often recognized for one powerful benefit: tuition-free college at Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC). But behind that benefit is something even more impactful – a comprehensive support system designed to guide students from high school through college and into meaningful careers.

This system doesn't start at graduation. It starts much earlier. And it stays with students every step of the way.

A Clear Pathway Starts with GRPS

For Grand Rapids students, the pathway is clear:

Students who live within the City of Grand Rapids and stay enrolled in Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) can remain eligible for Promise Zone benefits, as long as they are continuously enrolled in a designated high school beginning no later than the start of 11th grade.

Nearly 30% of Promise Zone-eligible GRPS Class of 2024 students enrolled during the 2024-25 academic year at GRCC.

This makes staying enrolled in GRPS more than just a school choice. It's a gateway to tuition-free college and long-term support.

More Than Tuition: A System Built for Student Success

While Promise Zone covers tuition at GRCC – up to 72 attempted credit hours or an eligible job training program – financial support is only part of the story.

The true strength of the program lies in its layered support system, built around three key pillars:

- High school coordinators
- GRCC support coordinators
- Academic advising

Together, these pillars create a guided pathway from high school to college completion.

High School Coordinators: Building the Foundation Early

Support begins before students ever step foot on a college campus.

Promise Zone high school coordinators work directly with students in GRPS buildings, helping them navigate critical early steps such as:

- Exploring college and career goals
- Understanding Promise Zone eligibility
- Preparing for college applications
- Completing the FAFSA and financial aid forms

These coordinators serve as trusted guides, helping students stay on track academically and ensuring they meet the requirements to access Promise Zone benefits.

"It (The Promise Zone) motivated me to try my best in high school knowing that I would have an opportunity to work towards my dream." – Payton Manuel, University Preparatory Academy, 2025

Of the GRPS schools the Promise Zone regularly visited during the 2025-26 school year, coordinators met with 97% of eligible Promise Zone high school years, averaging more than four meetings per student.

A Seamless Transition to College

One of the biggest challenges students face is the transition from high school to college – often referred to as "summer melt," when students who plan to enroll never actually make it to campus.

The Promise Zone actively works to prevent this by continuing support beyond graduation through programming and individualized outreach.

From application submission to course registration, students are guided through each step, ensuring they don't fall through the cracks during this critical transition.

GRCC Support Coordinators: Staying on Track in College

Once students arrive at Grand Rapids Community College, the support continues.

Promise Zone students have access to dedicated GRCC support coordinators who help them:

- Navigate campus systems
- Stay enrolled and persist semester to semester
- Connect with academic and personal resources
- Address challenges before they become barriers

These coordinators act as a consistent point of contact, helping students adjust to the expectations of college life.

The Promise Zone has experienced an increase in fall-to-winter semester retention rates since its inception. The class of 2024 had the highest retention rate yet for new incoming students during the 2024-25 academic year at 86%.

This ongoing guidance is a key factor in helping students not just enroll – but succeed.

Academic Advising: Mapping a Path to Completion

Beyond individual courses, students need a clear plan. That's where academic advising plays a critical role.

Promise Zone students work with advisors to:

- Select courses aligned with their goals
- Stay on pace for graduation
- Explore transfer opportunities
- Plan next steps beyond GRCC

This structured advising ensures students are not just accumulating credits, but moving intentionally toward a degree or credential.

"I'm so grateful the Promise Zone scholarship enabled me to experiment with different classes. Because I was able to explore, I have redirected my path and am excited about pursuing a career in art." – Gianni Tolliver, University Preparatory Academy, 2022

Continued on next page ►

From Associate to Bachelor's Degree: Expanding Opportunity

The Promise Zone was designed to open doors. And those doors are continuing to expand.

Through new partnerships with:

- Ferris State University
- Grand Valley State University

Students who complete an associate degree at GRCC may receive additional financial support to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Beginning this fall, students transferring to GVSU will also benefit from on-campus support through the university's Office of Student Support and Belonging, creating an even stronger network of guidance at the four-year level.

"When I transferred to Grand Valley State University, Promise Zone continued to provide guidance and support, helping me stay focused on my educational goals and succeed throughout my journey." – Amiah Romero, CA Frost Environmental Science Academy, 2023

This ensures the Promise Zone is not just a two-year solution, but a pathway to long-term educational attainment.

Connecting Education to Careers

In addition to academic support, Promise Zone students benefit from connections that extend into the workforce.

Through a partnership with the Grand Rapids Chamber, students gain access to:

- Career exploration opportunities
- Connections to local employers
- Insight into in-demand industries

This alignment between education and workforce needs helps students see a clear connection between their studies and their future careers.

FAFSA Workshops and Financial Navigation

Understanding how to pay for college can be one of the biggest barriers for families.

Promise Zone addresses this through FAFSA workshops and financial aid support, ensuring students and families:

- Understand the financial aid process
- Complete required forms accurately and on time
- Maximize available resources

This guidance helps remove confusion and builds confidence for families navigating college finances.

A Complete System of Support

Taken together, these elements create something powerful: a complete, coordinated system of support that follows students from high school into college and beyond.

It's a system designed not just to open doors – but to walk students through them.

"Overall, I would say that the Promise Zone has helped my education journey thus far by providing excellent learning opportunities and by allowing me a chance to work towards my goals and dreams. From tuition reimbursement to success coaches, the Promise Zone has made a promise and has helped all throughout. The Promise Zone will continue to help with my journey even outside of Grand Rapids Community College, so I'm forever grateful for the opportunity!" – Deavonni Alexander, Innovation Central, 2022

Keeping the Opportunity Within Reach

For families in Grand Rapids, the message is clear:

By living in the City of Grand Rapids and staying enrolled in GRPS, students can keep access to this powerful opportunity.

That choice, made year after year, keeps the pathway open to:

- Tuition-free college
- Personalized support
- Career-connected education
- A stronger future
- Looking Ahead

As the Promise Zone continues to grow – adding new partnerships, expanding support services, and reaching more students – it is helping redefine what's possible for young people in Grand Rapids.

What begins as a promise of tuition-free college becomes something much bigger:

A community-wide commitment to student success.

Stay enrolled. Stay eligible. Learn more at grpromisezone.com.

GRPS my choice
Grand Rapids Public Schools



Scholars Earn Scholarships in First Warner Norcross + Judd Contest

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) — GRPS scholars were recognized during the inaugural Warner, Norcross + Judd Scholar Competition, a new academic partnership highlighting scholar research, writing and critical thinking.

The reception, hosted by Warner, Norcross + Judd LLP at its downtown Grand Rapids offices, honored participants and winners from Grand Rapids Public Museum High School and Grand Rapids University Preparatory Academy.

As part of the competition, scholars completed a persuasive, historically grounded paper using the Lincoln-Douglas debate format. Each paper examined a social justice issue in U.S. history, connected it to a specific law, court case or policy, and argued whether the policy upheld or violated a core moral value.

Scholar work demonstrated strong critical analysis, with scholars evaluating historical laws and their lasting impact on society.

All participants received a cord recognizing them as Warner, Norcross and Judd scholars. The top two students in each class were awarded medals to wear at commencement, along with scholarships. First-place winners received $1,500, while runners-up were awarded $750.

"We are thankful to Warner, Norcross and Judd for their generous support of this competition," said Koleta Moore, director of the Department of Opportunity, Engagement, and Innovation. "We look forward to continuing to grow this program in the future."



PRINCIPAL PROFILE



Meet The Leader Who Decided To Be An Educator In First Grade

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Grand Rapids Montessori Academy and Middle High School Principal Kerri Reed has known she wanted to be a teacher since she was a child.

"I decided to declare my major when I was in first grade," Reed explained. "I wanted to be a kindergarten teacher."

That early aspiration was inspired in large part by one of her own teachers.

"Mrs. Clark was just one of the kindest people you would ever meet," she said. "She just really made me want to be a teacher that kids enjoyed coming to see."

Reed's mother, a school board member, also played a major role in shaping her future.

"Becoming a teacher and working in education was a big focus in my family growing up," she said. "My mom was volunteering all of the time at school. I can remember many conversations with her about how every child has something that they're passionate about and you have to find that passion in every child and make them want to be there."

Reed completed her student teaching at Straight Elementary in Grand Rapids, an experience that made a lasting impression.

"I really fell in love with Grand Rapids Public Schools at that time," she recalls. "I felt like it was where I was supposed to be."

She taught at GRPS for 13 years before becoming an administrator. A conversation during a parent-teacher conference eventually led her to Grand Rapids Montessori.

"I was having a parent-teacher conference with one of my sixth-grade students - the younger sister had come along and she started talking to me about her school," Reed said. "She just really sold me on Montessori and the opportunities that the students have here."

As principal of Grand Rapids Montessori, Reed now has the unique opportunity to support scholars from preschool all the way through graduation.

"I'm here to support them and to help them find a path that fits for them," she said. "I really enjoy that opportunity to hear from the younger children what they want to be when they grow up, and then to watch them through high school and see how that changes or doesn't change."

– Kerri Reed, Montessori Academy and Middle High School

Finding a Home in Nature

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Amarena Nelson was destined for this role. A graduate of GRPS, she grew up in a family rooted in education, with a father who dedicated his career to teaching at the high school level.

"I recall very early on saying, 'I'm going to be a teacher one day,'" Nelson recalled.

Now serving as principal of Burton Elementary School, Nelson's leadership marks a meaningful homecoming. She began her educational career in Detroit Public Schools and Baltimore City Public Schools before returning to West Michigan.

"After starting my own family, the decision to move back to Grand Rapids seemed really easy," she said. Her daughters now attend Burton Elementary School, allowing her to experience the school community as both a principal and a parent. "It's so amazing seeing my own daughter's going through the school system."

Each day, Nelson is focused on creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all.

"One thing that's very important is making sure that all of our scholars and family and staff feel like Burton Elementary is a place that they belong," she said.

She also values the unique structure of the Burton campus, where elementary and middle school scholars share the same building, creating continuity and strong relationships.

"Burton Elementary School is unique, that we have the middle school right upstairs, and we share many of the same spaces," she explained. "We're able to see our scholars grow from preschool all the way through eighth grade and see how they continue to develop as learners."



PRINCIPAL PROFILE

"One thing that's very important is making sure that all of our scholars and family and staff feel like Burton Elementary is a place that they belong,"

– Amarena Nelson, Burton Elmentary School

For Nelson, Burton Elementary represents the very best of what a school community can be.

"I think Burton Elementary is the best school on the planet. That rich history and the connection to community here is something I am so grateful to be a part of."



GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Main Library
111 Library St NE
616.988.5400

Madison Square
1201 Madison Ave SE
616.988.5411

Ottawa Hills
1150 Giddings Ave SE
616.988.5412

Seymour
2350 Eastern Ave SE
616.988.5413

Van Belkum
1563 Plainfield Ave NE
616.988.5410

West Leonard
1017 Leonard St NW
616.988.5416

West Side
713 Bridge St NW
616.988.5414

Yankee Clipper
2025 Leonard St NE
616.988.5415

grpl.org

Storytimes

Pajama Time
Get cozy in your pajamas, grab your favorite stuffed animals or blanket, and come to the library for a special bedtime event! Listen to stories, sing songs, and get those wiggles out before bed. Great for working parents and caregivers! For ages 0–5 years.

Mondays, June 1 – August 3
6:30 pm West Leonard Branch

Family Storytime
These storytimes feature great books, songs, fingerplays, and hands-on fun. Classes end with an art activity and playtime designed to help your child's brain grow. For ages 0–5 years.

Fridays, June 5 – August 7
10:30 am Ottawa Hills

Fridays, June 5 – August 7
10:30 am Van Belkum



Storytime on the Lawn
Join us for this outdoor storytime held on the lawn! Children and their caregivers will love this 30-minute event that features stories, songs, rhymes, and playing on the lawn. In case of inclement weather, this event series will be moved indoors. For ages 0–5 years.

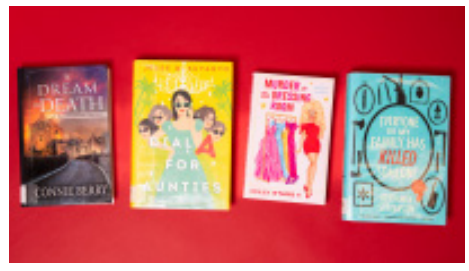
Wednesdays, June 3 – August 5
10:30 am Seymour

Outdoor Storytime
If you love stories, songs, and rhymes, join GRPL for outdoor storytime. This fun event for kids is the perfect way to get some wiggles out. Each child will take home a free storytime kit at the end of the program while supplies last. For ages 0–5 years.

Mondays, July 13, August 10
10:30 am Mulick Park
1632 Sylvan Ave SE

Mondays, July 20, August 17
10:30 am Lincoln Park
231 Marion Ave NW

Book Clubs



Cozy Mystery Book Club
Wednesday, August 5
6:00 – 7:00 pm Van Belkum

Curl up with a good mystery and join us each month for a cozy book club. We'll read charming and suspenseful mystery titles that spark fun conversation and connection with fellow readers and library staff. This book club is designed for adults.

Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone by Benjamin Stevenson

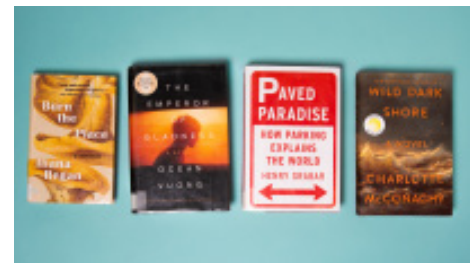


Sci-Fi Book Club
Wednesdays, July 8, August 12
7:00 – 8:00 pm Main Library

Join other science-fiction readers for a book club led by GRPL staff. Participate in a discussion about each book with members of the community. This book club is designed for adults.

July: *A Prayer for the Crown-Shy* by Becky Chambers

August: *Even Greater Mistakes* by Charlie Jane Anders



Popular Pages Book Club
Saturdays, July 11, August 8
12:00 – 1:00 pm Seymour

Join us for our monthly book club! Enjoy popular fiction and nonfiction titles selected by GRPL librarians and participate in a discussion about each reading with members of the community and library staff. This book club is designed for adults.

July: *Wild Dark Shore* by Charlotte McConaghy

August: *Burn the Place* by Iliana Regan

Events for Everyone

FOR KIDS

Comedy Magic with Cameron Zvara
Cameron's magic show is filled with mind-blowing magic, comedy, juggling, music, and tons of audience participation. For ages 6–11.

Tuesday, July 14
3:30 – 4:15 pm Main Library

Tuesday, July 28
2:00 – 2:45 pm Seymour

Introduction to Worms & Composting for Kids
Join Wormies Compost to learn how to start composting at home. This session covers why it matters, what materials are accepted, how to maintain your system, and when and how to use the finished product. Space is limited and first come, first served. For ages 6–11.

Tuesday, July 14
4:00 – 5:00 pm Van Belkum



Wildlife Experience with Blandford Nature Center
Meet some of the wild animals that call Blandford Nature Center home. Get up close to a variety of birds, mammals, and more. For ages 6–18.

Thursday, July 30
3:00 – 4:00 pm West Side

Tuesday, August 11
3:00 – 4:00 pm Main Library

Art Basics for Kids: Drawing Dragons
Using simple shapes, artist and illustrator Corinne Roberts will guide you step by step in creating your favorite dragons. No prior drawing experience is needed. For ages 6–11. Space is limited and first come, first served.

Tuesday, August 4
4:00 – 5:00 pm Ottawa Hills

Thursday, August 6
6:00 – 7:00 pm Madison Square

Thursday, August 13
4:00 – 5:00 pm Van Belkum

Special thanks to the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation – Meijer Fund and Edsko & Claire Hekman Family Fund.

FOR TEENS



Dungeons & Dragons for Teens
Whether you're new to D&D or a seasoned player seeking a fresh adventure, join us at the library for drop-in fun! Each session features a unique one-shot campaign. Bring your own character or use one of our premade options—no materials needed! For ages 11–18. Space is limited and first come, first served.

Tuesday, July 21
4:00 – 7:00 pm Seymour

Thursday, August 6
2:30 – 5:30 pm West Side

Special thanks to the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation – Meijer Fund and Edsko & Claire Hekman Family Fund.

FOR ADULTS

Introduction to Civic Engagement with Urban Core Collective
During this interactive workshop with Urban Core Collective, we'll learn more about decision making that impacts our lives at the local level and why our collective leadership is necessary to drive change. Participants will also learn about opportunities to get involved in local efforts. For teens and adults.

Monday, July 20
6:00 – 7:00 pm Seymour

Introduction to Waste Management with the Department of Public Works
This presentation offers an overview of Kent County's sustainable waste management system, along with practical ways to reduce waste in our daily lives. Much of what ends up in the trash isn't truly waste—it's material that can be reused, recycled, or composted. By building these habits together, we can make a meaningful environmental impact and reduce the amount of waste sent to the landfill. For teens and adults.

Tuesday, July 21
6:30 – 7:30 pm Main Library

Tuesday, August 18
6:30 – 7:30 pm Seymour

Special thanks to the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation.

Conversation Circle | English
Each week, join others who are practicing English through conversations centered around topics like music, food, sports, travel, and more! These casual and fun events are designed for adult English language learners.

Wednesdays, July 15, 22, 29, August 5, 12, 19, 26
7:00 – 8:00 pm Main Library

To Die For: Conversations on Death
This is a welcoming, non-judgmental space to discuss death and dying. Deathworkers Tracey Walker and Sarah Sun will guide the conversation without a set agenda, allowing participants to explore whatever comes up in the moment. It's a chance for open, meaningful dialogue. For teens and adults. Space is limited and first come, first served.

Tuesday, July 14
6:00 – 7:30 pm Seymour Branch

Special thanks to the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation and the Vander Veen Center for the Book Fund.

Dungeons & Dragons for Adults
Whether you're new to D&D or a seasoned player seeking a fresh adventure, join us at the library for drop-in fun! Each session features a unique one-shot campaign. Bring your own character or use one of our premade options—no materials needed! For ages 18 and up. Space is limited and first come, first served.

Thursday, August 27
4:00 – 6:00 pm West Side

Support library events.
Donate today.
Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation
www.grplfoundation.org

Service & Collection Spotlight

Printing, faxing, copying, and scanning

GRPL offers free printing, faxing, copying, and scanning services at all library locations. Printing is free, with a limit of 50 pages per week for library cardholders. Double-sided printing is considered two pages. Additional pages are 15 cents each. www.grpl.org/printing



Video Games

Drop by any location or visit our online catalog to explore our collection of popular video games for PlayStation 5, Nintendo Switch, Nintendo Switch 2, and Xbox X. www.grpl.org/games

Comic Geek Out



Saturday, July 18
12:00 – 5:00 pm Main Library

Discover your inner hero at the library's annual comic event. Celebrate the comic books you love and geek out about your favorite fandom. Join us for hands-on activities, snacks, free books, a comic & craft station, and other fun events designed for all ages.

Attendees can take home a free 2026 Comic Geek Out poster designed by Cody Coppernoll and enjoy free snacks and refreshments while supplies last.

Visit www.grpl.org/comicgeekout for more information.

ONGOING

12:00 – 5:00 pm, Level 3

– Arcade Games & Tabletop Extravaganza
– Comic Crafts & Trivia
– Fandom Facepainting with iLove Your Face
– Artists Alley
– Professional Cosplayers Meet & Greet
– Museum of Warriors

PRESENTATIONS

Swordsmanship Showcase

12:30 – 1:30 pm, Level 3, Auditorium

Join the Swordsmanship Museum & Academy for an engaging presentation on swordsmanship! Learn about the history and usage of rapiers, daggers, and smallswords.



Meet and Greet with Damien Haas

1:30 – 2:30 pm, Level 3, Auditorium

Join a Q&A session with voice actor Damien Haas! Damien Haas is an actor, writer, and voice actor best known for his work with Smosh Games on YouTube. His voice roles include Laios in *Delicious in Dungeon*, Kiyoka Kudo in *My Happy Marriage*, Heller in *Starfield*, and Shez in *Fire Emblem*.

Special thanks to the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation.

Ballads of Shorevania

3:00 – 4:30 pm, Level 3, Auditorium

Join Ballads of Shorevania, an interactive fantasy music show that mixes a cappella singing with a live Dungeons & Dragons adventure! Created by Kyler Wilkins and Alex Mironov, the show features actors and singers performing original songs that move the story forward. You're not just watching—you get to vote on choices and help decide what happens next!

SHOWCASE

Cosplay Showcase

4:30 – 5:00 pm, Level 3, Auditorium

Showcase your amazing cosplay at Comic Geek Out! Register at the welcome table for your age group when you arrive, then showcase your outfit on stage at the scheduled time to take home a prize!



Small Business Resource Center Spotlight



Interview with Montserrat Rosales Osoria, CEO of Green Leap

Steve Assarian, Business and Career Librarian: Why don't we start out with who you are and what's your business?

Montserrat Rosales Osoria: My name is Montserrat, but most people call me Montse. I'm the co-founder and CEO of The Green Leap.

I grew up in Mexico. Five years ago, I moved to Grand Rapids, and that's when I started a cricket-farming business. We are selling an easy, simple, and natural way for people to boost the nutrients in their everyday foods with a unique ingredient.

In some parts of Mexico, edible insects are really common. Throughout the country, we eat different species. The other day, I was reading that there are more than 500 different species of insects we eat in Mexico.

When we came here, that's when we started learning more about the nutritional and environmental benefits of edible insects. Before that, I was just eating them because I think they're delicious!

Steve: How does one farm crickets? What does your facility look like?

Montserrat: At first, we decided to do it for our family. We bought our first 500 crickets, and we started right in our basement.

We used a plastic moving box. Crickets need to have hiding spaces, so we used egg cartons for that. Normally, crickets will hide and only come out for food and water. Along with water, we feed them grains like oats and barley, and add fresh vegetables like lettuce, sweet potatoes, and celery. They'll pretty much eat everything.

Last year, we took the next step to grow our business, so we moved our facility outside our house. We have a dedicated barn, but the concept is still the same. We use vertical farming, and last cycle, I was able to harvest around 300,000 crickets for our business on just a small portion of land.

Steve: What would you say is the biggest challenge you face with cricket farming?

Montserrat: I didn't have any experience doing this. So everything was new for me. It's not super complicated, but it's definitely challenging to know temperature, humidity, the type of food you need, and best conditions so you can harvest successfully. That's the real challenge.

It's labor intensive, too. Crickets are tiny, but when you're moving boxes and doing the harvest, those crickets don't feel so light!

Steve: What does your product line look like?

Montserrat: So at the beginning, we didn't know exactly how we wanted to present our product to the community. We decided that a powder would be the best for people who've never heard about eating crickets. We just roasted them and ground them into a fine powder; that's what we are selling.

Right now, we sell a 4-ounce pouch of our powder. The only ingredient is 100% crickets. There are probably over 2,000 crickets per pouch. It looks almost like cocoa powder.

Steve: What is your favorite cricket recipe, or one that you found compelling?

Montserrat: I think it's very versatile, and I enjoy incorporating the cricket powder into regular recipes that I use every day. I put it in my coffee, and I also add cricket powder into the majority of snacks that I make for my kids, although they love the no bake bites. I find that when combined with sweet ingredients, the cricket flavor is barely noticeable.

But I would say my favorite recipe that we have discovered is a loaf of bread; by adding herbs, I think it brings an earthy, umami flavor. A delicious combination!

Steve: Are you selling in grocery stores? Are you selling at farmers markets? And what does that look like?

Montserrat: We are currently selling at the Fulton Street Market. We are now able to produce more product, so we are starting to knock on specialty stores and trying to see if there's an opportunity there for us as well.

Steve: When you came to the city, you got rolling really fast. What entrepreneurial support did you find in the city?

Montserrat: Everything was new for both of us. I was pregnant with my baby; the library was great for me and my daughter because they have storytimes and so on. And there I saw a brochure for the Small Business Resource Center. We were talking about starting with our crickets, going into business, so to have free resources to help us was really great. I was also able to find other resources and events in the city, like Culinary Conversations at the Downtown Market. It really helped us find our way.

Steve: What does the future look like for you?

Montserrat: We've definitely got some challenges ahead of us, but we are still leaning on our community as well. I'm an optimist about the future of our business. I think a lot of people are really looking to improve their nutrition and use local, responsible food sources. I know we can be that for our customers.

Steve: Where can people find you?

Montserrat: Right now, you can find us online at www.thegreenleap.net. There, you can find links to our social media, recipes, FAQs, and our online store. In person, you can find us at the Fulton Street Farmers Market at Fulton and Fuller during the summer. Hope to see you there!

This interview is part of GRPL's quarterly Small Business Resource Center eNews. Sign up for the newsletter by visiting www.grpl.org/sbrc.

The Small Business Resource Center is funded thanks to a generous grant from the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation—Titche Family Fund.

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