WE ARE GR

October 2026 | Section A

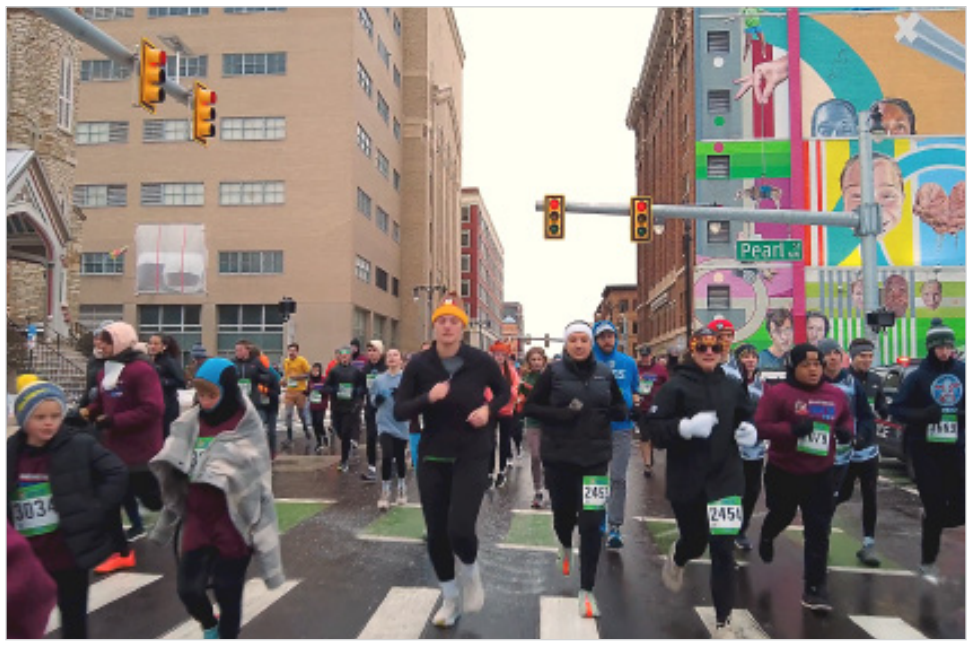




FOUR NEW PLAYGROUNDS FOR GRPS SCHOLARS: 6

PROMISE ZONE - MORE THAN TUITION: 8

Turkey Trot Expands With New Races, Sign Up Today!



GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – Get ready to "Move your feet before you eat!" at the annual Grand Rapids Public Schools Turkey Trot. Returning for its 34th year, the beloved Thanksgiving tradition will feature a new 10K race and the Mathnasium 1-Mile Walk in addition to the traditional 5K. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network are once again proud to serve as presenting sponsor of the event, which supports GRPS Athletics, promotes healthy living and brings the community together.

Register today

To celebrate the return of the Turkey Trot to downtown Grand Rapids, a special kickoff event took place outside Van Andel Arena, the race's starting line. The event provided an opportunity for businesses and community leaders to learn more about the Turkey Trot, the GRPS Foundation and ways they can support GRPS scholars through sponsorship, participation and volunteerism.

This marks Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network's 12th year as presenting sponsor, demonstrating its ongoing commitment to youth wellness and community health. Lake Michigan Credit Union (LMCU) also returns as Mini Trot sponsor for the fifth consecutive year, while Mathnasium returns as sponsor of the popular 1-Mile Walk.

"The Turkey Trot is a wonderful example of how a community can come together to support student success while encouraging families to develop and maintain healthy

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Community Feedback Shapes Candidate Profile for Next Superintendent

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- The Grand Rapids Board of Education has created a desired candidate profile for the next superintendent of GRPS, using feedback provided by more than 1,700 scholars, families, staff, and community members over the past two months.

Throughout August and September, GRPS hosted 20 focus groups, four in-person town halls, one virtual town hall, and an online survey to gather feedback from our community on the qualities that are most important in our next superintendent.

The Board of Education met on September 21 to review the feedback and select a candidate profile. The qualities selected based on community feedback are:

- Listens to understand, builds consensus, and acts decisively.
- Possesses strong communication and leadership skills, knowledge, and sensitivity required to respond to the opportunities and challenges presented by a diverse student body and community.
- The ability to work effectively with community partners and policymakers.
- Has a strong moral compass that is rooted in justice and equality.
- Has experience recruiting and maintaining exceptional staff for the district and schools.
- Experience with effective management that will benefit the long-term financial health of the district.
- Is strongly committed to a scholar centered philosophy in all decisions, in order to promote a healthy and safe learning environment.
- Commitment to both academic and extracurricular programs.
- Experience leading diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and commitment to working with all genders, races, and socio-economic group.

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► continued Superintendent cover story

- Promotes a positive and professional environment that includes mutual trust and respect among faculty, staff, administrators and Board.
- Demonstrates a deep understanding of special education that meets the individualized needs of each student.
- Has classroom experience in a K-12 setting.

"We really appreciate everyone who took the time to weigh in and share what they're looking for in our next superintendent," said Board of Education President José Rodriguez. "It was great to hear from so many people across our community. Your input helped us build a candidate profile that reflects what matters most to our scholars, families, staff, and community. Thank you for being part of the process!"

Community Engagement

The focus groups brought a diverse range of voices from across our community to the table to share feedback and perspectives. Participants included GRPS families, with dedicated sessions for Spanish-speaking families, Parent Action Leaders (PALs), and families of scholars receiving Special Education services. We also engaged leaders from local nonprofits, foundations, universities, early childhood education organizations, and faith communities. Additional focus groups included members of the Superintendent's Scholar Advisory Council, teachers, support staff, and administrators, as well as local lawmakers and community elders.

In-person town halls were held in each quadrant of the city, including one session conducted in Spanish. We also hosted a virtual town hall to provide an additional opportunity for community members to participate. All town halls offered live interpretation in Spanish, Kinyarwanda, and Swahili, to help ensure community members could fully participate and share their feedback.

A total of 1,421 online surveys were completed, providing valuable feedback on the qualities community members believe are most important in our next superintendent. Respondents were also given the option to share their racial demographic. Among those who responded, 49% identified as White, 15% as Hispanic, 15% as Black, 8% as multiple ethnicities, 2% as Asian, and 1% as American Indian. An additional 11% chose not to provide a racial demographic.

The board carefully reviewed the survey data by racial demographic to ensure the candidate profile reflected the top themes and priorities identified by each racial group.

Community Feedback

In addition to identifying qualities for the next superintendent, community members highlighted several strengths of GRPS:

- Dedicated Educators: Deep community pride in building teachers, support staff, and school principals.
- Specialized Theme Schools: High value placed on Montessori, IB, dual immersion, and CTE choice options.
- Wraparound Community Care: Strong appreciation for KSSN social workers and community partners.

Key challenges identified included:

Central Admin Disconnect: Perception of top-heavy administration at Franklin Campus detached from schools.

Staff Turnover & Compensation: Non-competitive teacher pay driving talent loss to neighboring districts.

Special Education Failures: Severe IEP and 504 compliance gaps due to staffing shortages.

There were also ideas presented for the future of the district:

- Resource Reallocation: Shift dollars out of central office overhead directly into classrooms and teacher salaries.
- Frontline Consultation: Consult teachers and families before introducing new software or curricula.
- Two-Way Communication: Establish authentic, transparent feedback channels with non-English families.

Key Themes for the Next Superintendent

Community feedback also highlighted three broad areas of focus for the next superintendent:

Turnaround Leadership

- Urban Track Record: Documented gains in 3rd-grade reading and math in high-need urban school systems.
- Courageous Management: Willingness to make tough staffing decisions when performance fails students.
- Trackable Milestones: Commits to 3-5 year measurable academic turnaround goals.

Advocacy & Resources

- Cross-Sector Funding: Proven record of securing dollars from state lawmakers, philanthropy, and business.
- Political Intelligence: Navigates complex urban school dynamics and community politics effectively.
- Statewide Presence: Strong legislative advocate for urban district funding reform.

Multicultural Focus

- Closing Gaps: Demonstrated outcomes for Latino, Black, and English-Learner scholars.
- Language Programs: Deep expertise in dual-language immersion and ELL pathways.
- Authentic Engagement: Culturally responsive communication with diverse urban families.

Superintendent Search Timeline

- October 24: Virtual screening of candidates
- October 26: Superintendent finalists announced
- October 28: Superintendent finalists tour the district and meet with stakeholders. The Board of Education conducts final interviews and selects the next superintendent.

You can follow updates on the search for our new superintendent at grps.org/supsearch.

Grand Rapids Public Schools
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October 2026
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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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► continued GRPS Turkey Trot cover story

habits," said Tanell Hills, Senior Community Liaison for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. "We're proud to continue our partnership with GRPS and support an event that encourages people to stay active, connect with one another and invest in the well-being of local students."

Returning this year, Turkey Trot participants are encouraged to bring nonperishable food items during packet pickup to support a community food drive, extending the event's impact beyond GRPS Athletics and helping address food insecurity in the Grand Rapids community.

The Turkey Trot is aiming to build on last year's record-breaking success, when more than 6,500 participants helped raise more than $275,000 for GRPS Athletics through registrations, sponsorships and donations.

"At GRPS, this school year is our 'Year of Impact,' and the Turkey Trot is a powerful example of that impact in action," said Dr. Leadriane Roby, Superintendent of Grand Rapids Public Schools. "The support generated through this event helps remove financial barriers for scholar-athletes and creates opportunities that help students thrive."

The 34th annual Turkey Trot will take place Thanksgiving morning in downtown Grand Rapids, bringing together runners, walkers, families and supporters from across the community.

Registration for the race is now open. Participants can sign up at grps.org/turkeytrot.

For updates and announcements leading up to race day, follow the Turkey Trot on Facebook and Instagram.

Jean Hamilton Cope Teachers of the Year Announced

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Three GRPS educators have been named the 2025-2026 Jean Hamilton Cope Teachers of the Year.

The honorees are, Mandee Allen at Sibley Elementary School, Stacey Post at Burton Middle School, and April Anderson at City High Middle School.

This annual award, established by generous donors Laurie and Mark Grand in honor of Laurie's mother, former GRPS teacher Jean Hamilton Cope, recognizes outstanding educators. The honorees receive $1,000 and are nominated for the Michigan Teacher of the Year Award.

The three winners will be celebrated during the October Board of Education meeting on October 12 at 6:30 p.m. in The Robert Dean Auditorium.

Elementary School Division Honoree: Mandee Allen, Sibley Elementary School



Mandee Allen serves as a third-grade teacher at Sibley Elementary School. With three decades of service to Grand Rapids Public Schools, she has built a reputation as a dedicated educator who combines high expectations with a deep commitment to her scholars.

Allen tailors her instruction to meet scholars' academic, social and emotional needs while encouraging them to embrace challenges and reach their full potential. Her calm, consistent approach fosters a classroom environment built on trust, confidence and a shared commitment to learning.

In addition to her classroom responsibilities, Allen serves on Sibley's Instructional Leadership Team, helping strengthen teaching and learning throughout the school. She also helps lead the school garden committee, providing scholars with hands-on learning experiences that connect classroom instruction to the world around them.

"I chose GRPS and was offered jobs in other districts, and this is where I wanted to be" stated Mandee Allen. "I wanted to meet the needs of students who needed a strong teacher."

Middle School Division Honoree: Stacey Post, Burton Middle School

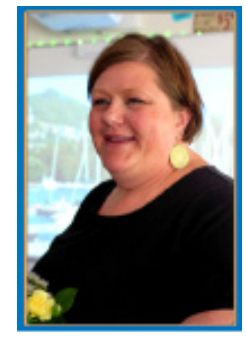


Stacey Post serves as a sixth-grade science teacher at Burton Middle School. Her leadership extends throughout the building, where she serves on the school's leadership team and as science department chair, advocating for data-driven instruction and creative curriculum development.

She has helped pilot an innovative STEM program for seventh- and eighth-grade scholars, creating additional opportunities for them to explore science through practical applications. She also returned to school to earn her English as a Second Language certification, further strengthening her ability to support learners.

Post remains committed to supporting the next generation of educators by mentoring teachers as they begin their careers.

High School Division Honoree: April Anderson, City High Middle School



April Anderson teaches French at City High Middle School. Hired as a part-time French teacher during the 2014-15 school year, she advocated for rebuilding the school's French program, growing it from a program slated for elimination to six levels of French instruction. Today, she teaches all six levels, continually refreshing her curriculum and creating engaging learning experiences for scholars.

Beyond the classroom, Anderson has served as a grade-level advisor, National Honor Society advisor, building union representative and supervisor of several clubs, including French, baking and travel clubs. She has also contributed to school theater productions through costume design. Passionate about providing opportunities beyond the classroom, Anderson has helped hundreds of scholars experience international travel, regardless of their financial circumstances, through organizations such as Passports and other fundraising efforts.

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.



City High Middle Tops West Michigan Rankings

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – City High Middle School once again claimed the top spot in West Michigan in the 2026 U.S. News & World Report Best High Schools rankings.

City High Middle had a near-perfect score of 99.67 in the rankings. The score ranks third highest in the state and in the top 60 nationally.

City High Middle was also named a Blue Ribbon School for the second time last school year.

Southwest Middle High School Academia Bilingüe also ranked in the top 25 for high schools in West Michigan.

U.S. News reviewed public schools in all 50 states and the District of Columbia for the 2026-2027 Best High Schools rankings.

"This recognition is a testament to the dedication of our scholars, educators, and families," said Superintendent Dr. Leadriane Roby. "We are so proud of the scholars who are working hard every day to reach their full potential and grateful to the educators who challenge and support them along the way."

Meet the 2026-27 Board of Education Scholar Representatives



Joshua Beckford



Sulmy Lopez-Perez



Odon Kiara

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – The three seniors selected to represent the GRPS student body at Grand Rapids Board of Education meetings are already making an impact in their communities.

Each school year, three seniors from the Superintendent's Scholar Advisory Council are selected to attend Board of Education meetings. They provide updates to the board and share information from board meetings with their school communities and the full advisory council.

You can learn more about the three scholar representatives below.

Joshua Beckford, City High Middle School

Joshua Beckford is a senior at City High Middle School and has been in Grand Rapids Public Schools for the last seven years. He is a student leader at City, previously serving on the Principal's Advisory and representing City the last two years on the Superintendent's Scholar Advisory Council.

Joshua spends much of his free time working and helping to support both his family and the community. This past summer he worked as an intern at the Grand Rapids chapter of the NAACP. He is planning to go to school for nursing and is looking forward to exploring his post-secondary options, which includes the possibility of attending school in Georgia.

Odon Kiara, Grand Rapids Public Museum High School

Odon is a senior at the Grand Rapids Public Museum High School. He's been a proud Museum scholar since the sixth grade. What makes Odon such a special scholar is his willingness not only to listen to others, but also to thoughtfully reflect on what he has heard and apply it in meaningful ways.

Odon possesses a genuine hunger not just for information, but for the process of transforming that information into knowledge and allowing that knowledge to guide his decisions with wisdom. This ability to learn, reflect, and grow is the foundation of an impactful and effective leader.

Sulmy Lopez-Perez, Grand Rapids University Preparatory Academy

Sulmy Lopez-Perez is a dedicated student leader at Grand Rapids University Preparatory Academy (UPREP). Sulmy is passionate about serving her school community, supporting younger students, and ensuring that students and families have a voice in decisions that affect them.

Through her experiences at UPREP, Sulmy has developed a strong commitment to mentorship and service. Since 2024, she has served as a 6th/7th grade mentor, providing younger scholars with academic assistance, encouragement, and emotional support. She also serves as an I.C.E. Resourcer, researching and connecting immigrant families with important resources and helping families navigate through challenging situations. These experiences have strengthened her ability to listen, communicate effectively, problem-solve, and advocate for others.

Sulmy is also active in the Grand Rapids community. Through her work with the Grand Rapids Civic Theatre, she has served as a teacher assistant, backstage crew member, and usher, developing strong teamwork, communication, and leadership skills. Her employment experiences as a babysitter, translator, and general staff member at Mermaid Bay Indoor Playground have further strengthened her responsibility, organization, customer service, and ability to work with people of different ages and backgrounds.

As a bilingual student, she brings an important perspective to student leadership. She understands the importance of making sure students and families feel welcomed, heard, and represented. She hopes to use her position as a student board representative to listen to her peers, elevate student perspectives, advocate for positive change, and help strengthen the relationship between students, families, staff, and school leadership.

Sulmy believes that effective student leadership means listening first, speaking up when it matters, and making sure every student has an opportunity to be heard.



Groundbreaking for State-of-the-Art Expansion at Grand Rapids University Preparatory Academy

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Grand Rapids University Preparatory Academy (UPREP) has officially broken ground on an expansion project that will add student learning & wellness programs, establish a technological hub for scholars, and build a state-of-the-art gymnasium.

"When I look around at those standing here today, I see proof that partnership works - that when a community invests in its young people, extraordinary things can happen," said Wayman Britt, Co-Chair of the capital campaign.

"This facility is designed to help students thrive academically, emotionally, socially, and physically. We are building a space that mirrors the future our students deserve," said Brian Cloyd, Co-Chair of the capital campaign.

Designed to support a growing scholar population, the 10,100-square-foot addition will provide much-needed classroom space along with a modern fitness area that serves as a hub for activity and learning. The flexible space will also accommodate school events, scholar-led activities, and regional gatherings.

"The Learning and Wellness Center represents our commitment to educating the whole child. It means scholars will have greater access to wellness resources, innovative learning spaces, technology, the arts, career exploration, and opportunities that prepare them not just for graduation but for life," said Kenyatta Hill-Hall, UPREP Principal.

The expansion is funded through a $7 million "Learn More, Live Well" capital campaign.

"This center reflects the very best of what can happen when schools, philanthropy, business leaders, and community partners rally around a shared vision. Together, we can create opportunities that will shape this community for decades," said John Kennedy, Honorary Chair of the capital campaign.

"This school offers every student the opportunity to realize their potential and build a successful future. Everything about this project is designed to help young people learn, grow, and prepare for life after high school," said Steve Van Andel, Honorary Chair of the capital campaign.

UPREP is a public/private partnership college-preparatory school serving grades 6-12 within the Grand Rapids Public School district. Founded in 2007, 90% of students graduate and advance to college. UPREP incorporates real-world business experiences in the daily curriculum and focuses their classrooms on being collaborative that resemble all work environments and encourage teamwork to achieve academic goals.





Four New Playgrounds Create More Inclusive Spaces for GRPS Scholars

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – GRPS celebrated the opening of four fully accessible playgrounds on the first day of school, marking a significant step forward in the district's ongoing efforts to create inclusive spaces where all scholars can play, move, and learn together.

"Today we celebrate an incredible summer of progress, building four new playgrounds at elementary schools across our city where all of our scholars can come together," Superintendent Dr. Leadriane Roby said during the ribbon cutting celebration.

New playgrounds were installed this summer at César E. Chávez Elementary School, Gerald R. Ford Academic Center, Kent Hills Elementary School, and Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Academy.

Designed to be fully accessible, the playgrounds allow scholars of all abilities to safely participate in outdoor play and physical activity together. Features include inclusive play equipment, accessible surfaces, and thoughtfully designed spaces that encourage movement, interaction, and collaboration. Scholar and staff input at each school inspired the final playground designs.

"This new playground is a place where everyone will get to play, explore, and have fun together," said Riley Ezell, an eighth grader at Gerald R. Ford Academic Center. "That's what makes this playground so special. Everyone belongs here. Everyone gets to be part of the fun."

The playgrounds at César E. Chávez Elementary, Kent Hills Elementary, and Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Academy were funded through the Reimagine GRPS with Us! bond approved by voters in 2023.

The playground at Ford Academic Center was made possible through community donations raised through a campaign led by the GRPS Foundation, along with supplemental funding from the Reimagine GRPS with Us! bond. Community volunteers also played a hands-on role in bringing the project to life, building the playground at Ford over three days in July.

"We are so incredibly grateful to our community for building this new playground for our scholars," said Denishea Neal-Killingham, Principal at Gerald R. Ford Academic Center. "The impact that this playground will have is significant."

"To our entire city, thank you for consistently showing up to support public education in Grand Rapids," said Board of Education Secretary Amber Kilpatrick. "When all of these groups come together, you show our kids that they matter. You show them that their community is here for them. You show them that they deserve spaces where they can grow and be themselves."

"I am so grateful to every donor, big and small, who believed in this project, and to the incredible volunteers who rolled up their sleeves and helped bring it to life," said GRPS Foundation President & CEO Stephanie Andrews. "Thank you for believing that our kids deserve a beautiful place to play, imagine, belong, and just be kids."

Donors included Applied Innovation, Barbara Gerson Family, Behler-Young, Carol Paine-McGovern, Dr. Khan and Liza Nedd, Grand Rapids Gold, Jim and Sue Williams, KRW Foundation, Lake Michigan Credit Union, Mary and John Williams, Mercantile Bank, Steve Faber and Elizabeth Williams, and Tim and Karen O'Donovan.

"It's a powerful moment," said Misti Stanton, President of the GRPS Foundation Board and First Vice President of Talent and Culture at Mercantile Bank. "This was truly a community effort. This was our staff at Gerald R. Ford, our parents, community folks just around here in this neighborhood that helped make this come to life."

"This space now belongs to the kids," said Matt Cook, Vice President of Corporate Social Responsibility at Lake Michigan Credit Union. "We hope it is filled with laughter, friendship, imagination, and countless moments of joy. Thank you for allowing LMCU to be part of this incredible project, and congratulations to everyone who helped make it happen."









Right, from top to bottom: Gerald R. Ford Academic Center, César E. Chávez Elementary, Kent Hills Elementary, Matin Luther King Jr. Leadership Academy.



Union High School Celebrates Culture and Community

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) - Union High School hosted its second annual Culture Celebration on Friday, September 18, bringing scholars, staff, and the community together for an afternoon of food, talent, and cultural connection.

The celebration featured food vendors and a variety of cultural performances, including choir, dance, a fashion show, and solo acts. Approximately twenty community and school vendors were also on hand. Scholars sampled international cuisines, celebrated the talents of their peers, and connected with valuable community resources.

The event received strong support from district personnel, including Family Support Specialist Delphine Ndoriyobija, who joined the celebration by participating in an African dance performance.

Youth Advocates Nehemiah Dix and Michala Carter, along with Student Council, organized the event. Dix said the preparation was a significant commitment from the beginning of the school year.

"It's pretty much non-stop from the start of the school year until the event, but we're so proud of the way it turned out," Dix said.

Kelly Greene, Chief Area Instructional Leader, attended the event and praised the scholars for their leadership and collaboration.

"It was a really special event! I love seeing the scholars lead and manage so many aspects of the event, especially the talent show. They did an incredible job supporting each other, cheering for each other, and demonstrating a lot of mutual respect," Greene said.





Board of Education Names Chambers The Robert Dean Auditorium

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) — The Grand Rapids Board of Education has named its board chambers "The Robert Dean Auditorium" in honor of the longtime community leader, pastor, and public servant.

Born in Grand Rapids in 1954, he graduated from Grand Rapids Central High School in 1972. He attended Ferris State College, earning a doctorate in theology.

In 1980, he founded New Life Church of God in Christ in Grand Rapids, where he serves as senior pastor. His commitment to public service includes serving on the Grand Rapids Board of Education, including as board president, as well as serving as a Grand Rapids City Commissioner and Michigan State Representative.

"He was elected to the school board in 1990 and served seven years. He served as president advocating for educational equity and student success," Rev. Kenneth Hoskins told the board. "He promoted strong partnerships between schools, families, and the community. That is something that he does every day."

"I feel honored," Bishop Robert Dean said during the dedication ceremony at the August 10 Board of Education meeting. "It was a privilege to sit in this seat as Board President. I was blessed to be here. I thank you for the blessing, the acknowledgement. I appreciate you Superintendent."

Dr. Betty Dean, who is celebrating 52 years of marriage with Bishop Dean, told board members that her husband "loves the city of Grand Rapids."

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From unsure to unstoppable:

How Isabel found her path through the Promise Zone



Photo Credit: Andrew Schmidt

When Isabel Herrera graduated from Southwest Middle High School in 2024, she knew one thing about her future: She wasn't ready to decide what came next.

So she didn't.

Instead of heading straight to college without knowing what she wanted to study, Isabel took a gap year. It gave her time to work, think about her interests and begin figuring out what she wanted for herself.

Today, she's a student at Grand Rapids Community College, studying pre-business with plans to pursue marketing at Grand Valley State University. And while her path to college wasn't necessarily a straight line, Isabel says the Grand Rapids Promise Zone helped make it possible.

Growing Up In Two Languages

Isabel was part of the first graduating class at Southwest Middle High School, a unique GRPS school designed for bilingual students, where she learned in both English and Spanish.

For Isabel, whose father is Mexican and mother is white, the bilingual education offered plenty of opportunities. It also presented challenges.

A subject like math, for example, might be taught in English one year and Spanish the next. And math wasn't always easy for her.

One teacher helped change the way she approached it.

Christopher Woods, her math and science teacher, showed her a different way to understand a subject she had struggled with. The experience helped Isabel see that something difficult didn't have to remain out of reach.

High school provided other lessons that she appreciates more now than she did at the time.

Presentations were one of them.

"I dreaded presentations," she said.

But standing in front of classmates again and again helped a shy student begin developing confidence she now recognizes as an important skill.

And Isabel had an unusual high school experience from the beginning. She entered Southwest as a freshman during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the new school had few of the routines and traditions that older schools inherit. By graduation, Isabel had become president of the student council and was one of just about 55 students in Southwest's first graduating class.

Giving Herself Time To Find The Right Path

Isabel first heard about the Grand Rapids Promise Zone as a high school junior when Promise Zone staff member Morgan Hannah visited Southwest.

She remembers hearing about free tuition. She didn't yet understand what it could mean for her.

That changed as graduation approached.

Isabel wasn't sure what she wanted to study or whether she was ready for college. Her parents had different perspectives. Her mother was comfortable with her taking time to decide. Her father, who immigrated from Mexico, hoped she would go to college.

Isabel chose to take a gap year.

But one important connection from high school remained.

Without a high school counselor to turn to after graduation, Isabel reached out to Morgan. That connection helped her navigate FAFSA and the other steps involved in going to college.

By then, the Promise Zone had become something much more tangible than the program she had first heard about as a junior.

When Isabel was finally ready for college, there was little question about where she would begin.

GRCC felt like the obvious choice.

"Graduate, then free college at GRCC," she said. "It was a no-brainer."

Prep with Promise Zone orientation, followed by a campus tour to find the buildings where she would attend classes, made college start to feel real.

A bigger world at GRCC

Going from a graduating class of roughly 55 students to GRCC was an adjustment.

At Southwest, Isabel had known some of her classmates since kindergarten. Suddenly, she was entering a much larger campus where she didn't know many people.

Her first day brought the expected nerves, although having taken dual-enrollment courses at GRCC during high school gave her some confidence.

The biggest challenge?

"Parking," she joked.

The more significant adjustment came in learning to take ownership of her education.

College professors weren't going to constantly remind her about assignments and deadlines. Isabel had to manage her own schedule and her own time.

That independence has also become one of her favorite parts of college: choosing her schedule, deciding how to spend her time and taking greater responsibility for herself.

She has found professors who made an impression, too, including English professor Roel Garcia. Isabel enjoyed writing essays in Garcia's class and appreciated his approach to teaching.

"I could not be more grateful," she said.

"If the Promise Zone is available to you, use it."

And slowly, the student who once dreaded raising her hand or speaking in front of the class has continued becoming more confident.

More Than Tuition

Now that she is attending GRCC, Isabel understands something about the Grand Rapids Promise Zone that she didn't fully grasp when she first heard about it.

The support goes well beyond tuition.

For Isabel, Promise Zone assistance has helped with expenses such as books, parking and food. Just as importantly, it has connected her with people, resources and experiences that have helped her navigate college and begin thinking about what comes after it.

When she first started at GRCC, Isabel met monthly with a support coordinator who became a go-to person for questions, helped her navigate scheduling and college resources, and made sure she stayed on track. Promise Zone students also have access to academic advising and other support designed to help them make intentional choices about their education and future.

But for Isabel, some of the most meaningful opportunities have happened outside the classroom.

Through the Promise Zone, she has been invited to events that put her in rooms with business and community leaders and introduced her to people and experiences she otherwise might not have encountered. Those opportunities have helped Isabel, who describes herself as a shy kid growing up, become more comfortable putting herself out there, making connections and thinking about her own career possibilities.

That kind of exposure is intentional. Through a partnership with the Grand Rapids Chamber, Promise Zone students can access career exploration opportunities, connections with local employers and greater exposure to industries and career paths in the Grand Rapids community.

"You have support and opportunities that other students don't have," Isabel said.

For a student now interested in marketing, content and social media, those connections have value beyond college coursework. They are helping her build confidence, expand her network and see more clearly where her education might take her.

The financial support remains significant. Removing that worry has made an "indescribable difference" for her family, Isabel said. College would have represented a major financial challenge, and she isn't sure how she would have paid for it otherwise.

Instead, she gets to focus on being a student, exploring her interests and preparing for what comes next.

"That would be another stress," Isabel said.

Finding Room For Business And Creativity

Isabel's plans for the future are still taking shape, and she's comfortable with that.

Once, she pictured becoming an illustrator. Art remains important to her, but she ultimately decided she didn't want to depend on her passion as her profession.

Working at Goodwill helped her recognize other strengths and interests. She began exploring business administration and discovered marketing, a field where she could combine business with the creativity she enjoys.

Now enrolled in a pre-business pathway, Isabel plans to eventually study marketing at Grand Valley State University through the partnership with the Promise Zone. She is interested in content and social media as well as market and consumer research, and a job-shadowing experience with Goodwill's marketing team helped her see more of the possibilities.

She's already getting a chance to put some of those interests into practice, helping create social media content for the Promise Zone. It's another opportunity to build her skills and gain real-world experience as she considers where a career in marketing could take her.

Her dream is eventually to put those skills to work for a nonprofit. She's also considering a minor related to environmental sustainability.

Ask where she pictures herself five years from now, and Isabel has an image in mind.

"In an office wearing a suit," she said.

More than anything, she wants to be successful and excelling at something she cares about.

College has helped her realize how many different versions of that future are possible.

Her Advice: It's Ok Not To Be Ready

If Isabel could talk with the shy high school freshman she used to be, she knows what she would tell her.

Be more confident. Take advantage of the resources around you. Build relationships. Put yourself out there.

And to current GRPS students wondering what happens after graduation, Isabel offers advice shaped by her own experience: You don't have to have everything figured out immediately. The Promise Zone provides support wherever a student may be at in their journey.

College is a commitment, she said, and students should take advantage of counselors and other school resources to ask questions and explore their options. She also recommends experiences such as job shadowing before choosing a career path.

Most importantly, she believes students should give themselves permission to be honest about whether they are ready.

"I know what it's like to not be ready for college," she said. "It's OK if you change your mind."

Taking a year before beginning at GRCC didn't put Isabel behind. It helped her move forward when she was ready.

Today, she has a job, attends college and is developing a clearer sense of where she wants to go. For someone who remembers being too shy to raise her hand in class, those are accomplishments worth celebrating.

And she knows the Promise Zone has played an important role in making that growth possible.

She has a simple message for other eligible GRPS students:

"If the Promise Zone is available to you, use it."

Learn more: grpromisezone.com.



PRINCIPAL PROFILE

Principal's Path to Education Started with Influential Teacher in Middle School

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Today, Wayne Hill serves as principal of Brookside Elementary School, but his journey into education began in seventh grade when he had his first male teacher.

"I was like, man, this is pretty cool," Hill remembered. "He's very impactful."

That experience inspired Hill to pursue a career in education, eventually becoming a middle school science teacher. Having attended Mulick Park Elementary School, he had a strong desire to return to Grand Rapids Public Schools.

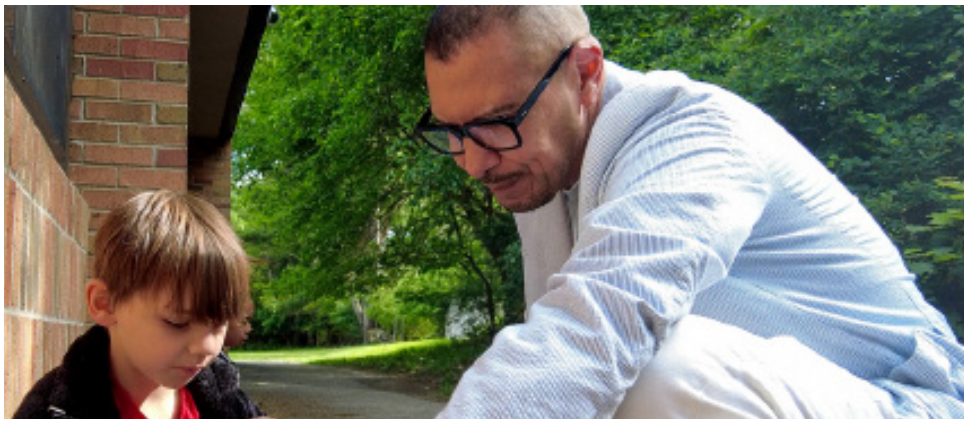
"My passion was to come back to a district that I love and give back to them and just be a positive influence to the scholars that are here," Hill said.

Now, as a principal, Hill works each day to show scholars that he cares about them and believes in their potential.

"I try to treat each kid like they're my own," he said. "Building those relationships is the is the first thing to helping scholars achieve academic success."

Hill says one of the keys to his success at Brookside is the strong team of educators he has the opportunity to work alongside each day.

"I have a lot of great teachers around me that that help me out," he said. "We're doing the best to just continue to show the positive impact that GRPS can have on scholars, families and all stakeholders."



PRINCIPAL PROFILE

Shawmut Hills Academy Principal Proud to Lead 'Hidden Gem'

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) -- Joseph Alcaraz believes Shawmut Hills Academy is one of the best-kept secrets in Grand Rapids.

"We want to bring children here because it is truly a hidden gem," Alcaraz said. "I'm thrilled to be here. If we haven't met, it's just a matter of time before we do. I look forward to that."

Alcaraz began his career as a teacher in Detroit before becoming a principal outside Boston. Becoming a grandfather eventually brought him back to Michigan.

"The moment I got the news I was going to be a grandfather my goal was to be home," he said.

Alcaraz believes the staff at Shawmut Hills make the school truly special.

"That's what really sold me on the school, is that teachers are here for the right reasons," he said. "I like to be an extension of my staff and them an extension of me - and what can we do together to really make the gains for our children."

His approach to leadership is also shaped by his own upbringing. Alcaraz grew up in a large, close-knit family with nine sisters and five brothers.

"I had an upbringing from my father who believed that we can do anything we decide he wanted to do," he said.

For Alcaraz, the most rewarding part of education has always been the relationships he builds with scholars.

"It was always the joy that would show up on their faces, the excitement of them coming back into the classroom, the high fives, the hugs, the sticky fingers," he said. "It's those moments where you don't know the impact you're having, but just knowing that you really are having an impact."



Coit Principal Focuses on Helping Every Scholar Thrive

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) – Ever since kindergarten, Molly Ali knew she wanted to become an educator. Now, as Principal of Coit Creative Arts Academy, she is focused on helping every child thrive by creating a school where scholars are excited to learn and feel supported every day.

"When I was in kindergarten, my teacher - I loved her so much," Ali recalled. "I knew from that moment that I wanted to be a teacher."

That passion led her from teaching kindergarten to working overseas.

"I moved abroad and I started teaching at a primary years program. I discovered my passion for the framework curriculum of the International Baccalaureate," she explained. "It was eye opening. It was absolutely amazing. Then I got to come back here and bring that experience to what I'm doing here."

Today, Ali says Coit is a place where scholars want to be.

"Kids come here for not only to learn, but they come here with excitement. They come here because they're excited to learn because that's what our staff does. Our staff gets them excited to learn," she said.

Ali hopes every scholar knows they have someone in their corner.

"I'm going to help them with whatever they need, I'm going to support them, I'm going to be their cheerleader to make sure that they thrive and they do it the best that they can here."

Above all, she wants every child to know they belong.

"Every student is welcome no matter what their background, no matter what their strengths, that they are all here to do the best that they can."



PRINCIPAL PROFILE

GRPS ATHLETICS



Coach Q Returns Home to Lead Ottawa Hills Girls Basketball

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) — Quistelle Williams is returning home to Ottawa Hills High School, her alma mater, as the new varsity girls basketball coach.

"I love Ottawa Hills. I've been trying to get back here. I now have that opportunity," Coach Q said. "I'm excited to instill what has been instilled into me into the girls."

Her goal is to help restore the tradition of girls' basketball at Ottawa Hills.

She explained that basketball was an important outlet while growing up.

"Basketball got me through everything," she said. "It helped me basically become the person I am today. It got me out of a lot of tough situations. It was more so like my therapy as a kid. It's my first love and I honestly still love it today."

After high school, she received multiple offers to continue her playing career – ultimately deciding on the University of Arkansas. After her playing career, she returned to West Michigan and began coaching. She has coached at Union High School, Grand Rapids Community College, and multiple travel basketball organizations.

"I'm looking for players that are hard-working, don't mind hitting the floor," she said. "I want them to practice just as hard as they will play a game. They're going to have to pick each other up."

"I am looking to give them a fresh start, remind the city how good women's basketball used to be here at Ottawa, and just give it all I got," Coach Q exclaimed.

Williams also plans to emphasize success in the classroom.

"You've got to be a student before you can be an athlete," she said. "If you work hard at basketball, you work hard in the classroom, you get results."

Her message for the Ottawa Hills community is simple: "Go Bengals!"



A Day in the Life: Ottawa Hills Volleyball

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRPS) - For Museum High School's Alana Mortensen and Jazzlynn Calderon, being an Ottawa Hills volleyball player means learning how to make every hour count. Mortensen, a senior outside hitter, starts her day in the Nurse Technician Program at Kent Career Technical Center, while Calderon, a junior outside hitter, begins hers in KCTC's Auto Collision Program. Different programs and different schedules, but by afternoon, their paths lead to the same place: the Ottawa Hills volleyball court.

Mortensen arrives at Museum around 9:30 a.m. for AP Economics, AP Biology, senior capstone, and an online psychology course through Grand Rapids Community College. Calderon's school day includes AP Literature, AP Economics, advisory, and an online College Algebra course through GRCC.

By about 4:00 p.m., the two are back together. Mortensen helps set up the net, Calderon arrives by bus, and practice begins at 4:30 sharp. For the next three hours, everything else on their calendars takes a back seat to volleyball.

For Mortensen, that is exactly what makes the sport her favorite part of the day.

"Volleyball is where I can relax and be in my zone," she said.

Calderon finds a similar escape in the sport. After playing with many of the same girls for years, volleyball has given her a place to build relationships while also pushing herself outside her comfort zone.

Their routines are both demanding, so each player has developed her own way of managing that pressure. Mortensen depends on a color-coded calendar to keep track of school, volleyball, work, and personal time. Calderon works her schoolwork around the fixed schedule of volleyball, sometimes using weekends to catch up when unexpected things throw off her plans.

Their weekends look a little different, but both make an effort to stay connected to the people and activities outside of volleyball. Mortensen spends her weekends at tournaments and working at a children's clothing store, while Calderon prioritizes time with family and friends. Sundays are especially important for Calderon, as her family gathers for breakfast as a way to recap their week.

That balance between volleyball and life outside the court is part of what makes their Bengals experience so meaningful. Both have found a sense of community on a team made up of players from different schools, backgrounds, and grade levels. For Mortensen, that community has become a "family-oriented experience," while Calderon values the opportunity to bond with teammates and meet new people.

After practice, both return home and finally slow things down.

Their days are busy, but volleyball is not simply another item on their calendars. It is the common thread running through their days, providing a place for students to come together, compete, and build community.

For Mortensen and Calderon, the long days are part of the commitment—but so is the sense of belonging waiting for them on the court.

GRPS my choice® Grand Rapids Public Schools



A Day in the Life: Union Girls Swim & Dive

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (GRSP) - Morning swim practices have a reputation for being early. For Abigail Kaiser, early starts are measured in another hour altogether.

At 4:30 a.m., while her teammates are still asleep, Kaiser is already undergoing 45 minutes of respiratory therapy to treat cystic fibrosis, a genetic disease that affects her lungs and other organs.

Some mornings, she'll head to the pool before school, too.

Then comes breakfast, medication, and classes at City High Middle School. After school, Kaiser heads to Union for another two hours of swimming, where she competes in the 500m freestyle and 100m breaststroke.

She joined swim for her health. Along the way, it became something more.

"Abigail always does what she's asked," said Redhawks swim coach Ian Wesolowski. "You would never know that she has CF. She doesn't let that affect her."

Kaiser started swimming as a sophomore after encouragement from her brother, Caleb, who also swam at Union, and her longtime friend and teammate, Emersen Brower. Last season, Kaiser was named the team's most improved swimmer.

Wesolowski said he is especially impressed that Kaiser swims the 500m, an event that demands endurance.

"You'd think it would be difficult for her," he said, "but you'd never know she is dealing with CF."

While Kaiser's mornings begin with medical treatment and, at times, swimming, Brower's days begin with a different kind of responsibility.

The City High Middle School senior is captain of the Union team while also serving as senior editor of the yearbook, co-vice president of Student Ambassadors, and vice president of Student Council. Her week is filled with meetings— Student Council on Tuesdays, yearbook on Wednesdays, and Ambassadors on Thursdays—before she heads to the pool.

Brower has learned to communicate with Wesolowski when club responsibilities make her late to practice. She brings snacks for the transition from school to swimming and relies heavily on planning to keep everything moving.

"It's all about understanding my priorities and making sure I keep myself grounded in all I'm doing," she said.

For both swimmers, school and sports require careful time management.

Kaiser's junior and senior years have brought increased academic demands through the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. Because she cannot write while undergoing her respiratory treatments, she has to find other opportunities to finish assignments. Often, that means completing schoolwork on the pool deck.

For Brower, homework happens after practice, between events at meets, or during whatever pockets of time she can find. Weekends often become catch-up time for school, club responsibilities and, during the fall, college applications.

But neither athlete's identity ends at the pool.

Kaiser spends Saturdays at archery practice and works as a lifeguard at the YMCA. She enjoys crafting and sewing and is in her 13th year of Girl Scouts. She serves as a Scout Level Ambassador, Mackinac Island Honor Scout Senior Leader, and troop leader at Grand Rapids Montessori.

She especially enjoys working with younger girls and helping preserve the traditions she valued growing up.

Brower spends winters skiing, a passion she has had since she was three. She recently traveled to Italy with her dad and plans to ski in Chile. She also plays Redhawks soccer and enjoys movies and television when she finds time.

Despite their busy schedules, both have found a place in swimming.

Brower describes herself as intensely competitive before her events, while Kaiser brings a steady determination that has helped her grow as a swimmer.

Their routines may look different, but both reflect the culture of Union girls swim and dive: show up, work hard, and make no excuses.

GRPS ATHLETICS
Strong Minds, Future Champions

Ottawa Hills Bengals
Marcus Harris, Athletic Director
HarrisMar@grps.org | 616.819.2879

Union Redhawks
Justin Walker, Athletic Director
WalkerJu@grps.org | 616-819-7688

GRPS my choice
Middle School Athletics
Brodie Larson, MS Athletic Director
LarsonB@grps.org 616-819-3243

616.819.2112 Athletics@grps.org

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WE ARE GR

GRVOTES

Get Ready for the 2026 Elections

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SAFE
Safe Alliances for Everyone

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Grand Rapids Residents Give High Marks in 2026 Community Survey

Grand Rapidians continue to recognize its hometown as a great place to live, according to results from the City's 2026 National Community Survey. The survey, conducted every other spring by Polco's National Research Center, shows strong confidence in parks, arts, culture and overall quality of life, while also highlighting areas where you want to see improvements such as safety, transportation and communication.

City Manager Mark Washington says the ratings show that you believe in the direction of the city. "Residents continue to tell us Grand Rapids is a great place to live, work and visit," he said. "We are grateful for that trust, and we remain focused on keeping Grand Rapids a place where everyone can thrive."

Mayor David LaGrand reacted to the presented results saying, "It's encouraging to see the positive trends reflected in this year's survey, and we're grateful to everyone who took the time to share their experiences and ideas. Their feedback helps us understand what's working and where we have opportunities to improve. We'll continue working together — across City departments and with our community — to build on this progress, address areas where we can do better and strengthen the quality of life for everyone who calls Grand Rapids home."

Key Strengths

- **Quality of life and community commitment.** Eight in 10 residents rated the overall quality of life in Grand Rapids positively. More than 9 in 10 said they would recommend living in the city, and 83% said they are likely to remain in Grand Rapids for the next five years.

Continued on page 12 ►

OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE
Residents gave excellent or good ratings to:

91% Would recommend living in Grand Rapids to someone who asks

85% Grand Rapids as a place to live

83% Plan to remain in Grand Rapids for the next five years

81% The overall quality of life in Grand Rapids

80% Your neighborhood as a place to live

71% Overall image or reputation of Grand Rapids



National Community Survey™, 2026

A Message from the City Manager: Measuring Our Progress



Each year, the City of Grand Rapids takes time to look back at our performance: what we set out to accomplish, what we delivered, what the data tell us and where we need to keep improving.

We recently presented our FY2026 Annual Performance Report to the City Commission. The report covered the fiscal year that ended June 30 and looked at our work across the six priorities in our Strategic Plan: Governmental Excellence; Economic Prosperity & Affordability; Engaged & Connected Community; Health & Environment; Mobility; and Safe Community.

Performance management is an important part of how we serve our community. Our Strategic Plan establishes our long-term direction. Each year, we identify Focus Areas requiring particular attention and align resources through our annual budget. Departments then turn those priorities and resources into services, programs and projects. We measure results so we can understand what is working, where challenges remain and what we need to do differently.

FY2026 was a busy and consequential year for Grand Rapids. We continued modernizing City government, including implementation of our new financial and administrative systems and responsible consideration of what artificial intelligence means for city government. We maintained our Aa2/AA bond ratings, reflecting continued attention to the City's long-term financial health. We reached three-year agreements with all of our employee bargaining units and continued investing in employee development. Employee turnover was 7.9%, well below our goal of less than 10%, and nearly 70% of employees participated in wellness programs. We also completed the relocation of City services and employees to 1500 Scribner, creating a new hub for City operations and resident services.

Across the community, we continued significant investments in housing, streets, parks, the riverfront, and inclusive economic opportunity. The City permitted 1,621 new dwelling units – exceeding our annual goal of 1,100 and the most in any of the past five years. Major street and bridge projects moved forward, along with accessibility and pedestrian-safety improvements. We inspected or repaired 92 miles of sidewalk, and 100% of City bridges were in good repair. The new MLK Community Center opened, and investments continued in parks, trails, drinking water and environmental infrastructure. We maintained 100% compliance with regulatory drinking water standards, while 20% of residential waste was diverted through recycling. The new Acrisure Amphitheater began its inaugural concert season and construction continued

Continued on page 12 ►

Manager's Letter, continued from page 13

on the Amway Soccer Stadium which will host its first match next spring.

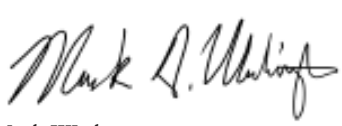
We also continued strengthening public safety. The Police Department maintained 100% beat coverage while continuing investments in recruitment, training and community-based approaches to safety. Our outreach connected with 1,013 domestic violence victims, with 230 accepting services. Community-based violence prevention efforts recorded 3,068 engagements that led to violence interruptions and disruptions, and 1,161 people were diverted from the criminal justice system. The Kendall Street Fire Station opened in September 2025 as our 12th fire station, while construction continued on the Division Avenue Fire Station and new Fire Training Center. We also expanded approaches that complement traditional emergency response, including behavioral-health partnerships, violence prevention and other community-based strategies.

An annual performance report is not intended simply to list accomplishments. Accountability also means identifying areas where results have not yet reached our goals and using that information to guide future decisions. That is why we track operational measures, project milestones and resident feedback – and use what we learn to inform our priorities, investments and management decisions for the year ahead.

You can learn more about the City's approach to performance management and explore our performance information at https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/government/open-data-and-performance-metrics/.

You can also watch the Sept. 22 City Commission presentation and review the Annual Performance Report slides at https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/government/city-commission/.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve Grand Rapids. We are proud of the progress made during FY2026, clear-eyed about the work that remains and committed to continuously improving how we serve our community.



Mark Washington
City Manager

Measuring our Progress, continued from page 13

- **Safety.** Residents' perceptions of safety continue to move in a positive direction. Ratings for crime prevention and overall feelings of safety both reached their highest levels since the survey began in 2019, reflecting continued progress in how residents experience safety in Grand Rapids.

- **Economy.** Residents continue to express confidence in Grand Rapids as a place to visit and experience. The city outpaced its peer communities in ratings for being a Place to Visit, reinforcing Grand Rapids' growing reputation as a destination for residents and visitors alike.

- **Parks and recreation and cultural opportunities.** Residents rated parks, recreation programs, fitness opportunities and paths/trails positively, with several results aligning with or exceeding comparison benchmarks. Opportunities to attend arts, cultural and music activities also ranked highly, as did community support for the arts. Public library services received near-universal positive ratings.

- **Education, arts and culture.** Overall opportunities in this category again scored among the highest across all facets, continuing a multi-year trend of strong resident support.

Washington says the City takes these ratings seriously. "Strong ratings for our parks, arts and cultural offerings show the value of long-term investment," he said. "At the same time, feedback on safety, transportation and core services reminds us that steady, intentional work is still needed."

What You Told the City About Construction Updates

This year, the survey included special questions about roadwork communication. About six in 10 residents reviewed current communication as good, but many want clearer and more timely information. Residents ranked direct mail, email or text alerts as their preferred communication channels.

What Happens Next

The City has used and will continue to use the survey results to inform future budgets, department priorities and long-term goals. Results are available on the City's website and will contribute to on-going neighborhood engagement activities.

Take Note Before You Vote

As the general election approaches on Tuesday, Nov. 3, keep in mind that the ballot isn't the only thing you should be paying attention to at the polls. Taking a moment to notice what's happening around you can help you stay prepared and make informed decisions if circumstances change. This is known as situational awareness, and it's a skill you can use anywhere!

Election season brings a unique security environment. Increased activity at polling places, heightened public engagement, and greater visibility for election officials and volunteers mean we all play a role in helping keep these spaces safe.

The Grand Rapids Office of Emergency Management (OEM) supports the safety and coordination of Election Day operations. On Election Day, OEM will activate the City's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to monitor city activity, support our public safety partners and help ensure quick communication if something unexpected arises.

Before and during your trip to the polls:

- Take a look around. Notice where you are and what's happening around you. Be aware of entrances, exits and the people in your immediate surroundings.
- Keep your phone ready. Make sure your phone is charged and accessible so you can receive emergency alerts or contact someone if needed. Text GRANDRAPIDS to 888777 to sign up for alerts!
- Have a plan. Know where your polling location is and how you'll get there. Consider what you'll do if your route or plans change.
- Follow the lead of election workers. Follow posted instructions, listen to election workers and give others space.
- Speak up. If you notice an emergency or something that requires attention, move to a safe location and notify an election worker or emergency personnel. Avoid putting yourself in harm's way or attempting to handle the situation yourself.

Being situationally aware doesn't mean expecting something to go wrong. It means being present, prepared and ready to respond. So, as you head to the polls this election season to make your voice heard, take a moment to look around and be aware of your surroundings.

For more safety tips and emergency preparedness information, follow the Grand Rapids Office of Emergency Management (OEM) on social media @ ReadyGrandRapids or visit grandrapidsmi.gov/departments/emergency-management.

GRVOTES

GRVOTES

Get Ready for the 2026 Elections

You face a busy election year, and Grand Rapids City Clerk Joel Hondorp wants to help you stay prepared. You'll find key dates and information here so you know what to expect when you vote.

November 3: General Presidential Election

Partisan Section
Candidates for Federal, State, and County offices.
To vote the partisan section of the ballot, you may cast a "straight ticket", a "split ticket" or a "mixed ticket."

- Straight Ticket: Vote the party of your choice. Nothing further needs to be done in the partisan section.
- Split Ticket: You may vote a straight ticket AND vote for individual candidates of your choice.
- Mixed Ticket: Vote for the individual candidates of your choice in each office.

Non-Partisan Section must be voted separately
Judges, City of Grand Rapids (Comptroller, City Commissioner, Library Board), Grand Rapids Community College, Local School Districts, State and County Proposals

Voters have 3 options in order to cast their ballot.

- **Early Voting** - Grand Rapids voters may go to any early voting site to get a ballot, vote and place the ballot in the tabulator during a nine-day period. Voters may also bring their absentee ballot to the Early Voting site to tabulate that ballot.
- **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. Ballots may be returned by postage paid mail, in a secure drop box, in person at the Clerk's Office or in a tabulator at an early voting site or designated polling location. A list of drop boxes can be found at https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/departments/clerks-office/elections/current-election-information/
- **Election Day Voting** – Tuesday, Nov. 3. The polls are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Check www.michigan.gov/vote to verify your registration status and polling location. Voters may also bring their absentee ballot to their polling location to tabulate that ballot.

Important Election Websites:
www.grandrapidsmi.gov/grvotes
www.michigan.gov/vote
www.kentcountyvotes.com

Some reminders before you head to the polls:

- 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 www.michigan.gov/vote.

Get involved – Become an Election Inspector

- In order to run successful elections, we need help from the community. Election inspectors are on the frontline of democracy. You will be able to see firsthand how the election process works. Election inspectors 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 inspector.

  https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/departments/clerks-office/elections/election-inspectors/

POLLING LOCATIONS

Locations:

Sts. Peter and Paul School	1430 Quarry NW
GRPS University	1400 Fuller NE
Ottawa Hills High School	2055 Rosewood SE
New Hope Baptist Church	130 Delaware SW

Days and Times:

Tuesday, October 20	11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Wednesday, October 21	9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Thursday, October 22	11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Friday, October 23	9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Saturday, October 24	9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sunday, October 25	9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Monday, October 26	9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Tuesday, October 27	11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Wednesday, October 28	9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Thursday, October 29	11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Friday, October 30	9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Saturday, October 31	***7 a.m. to 3 p.m.***
Sunday, November 1	9 a.m. to 5 p.m.



New Division Avenue Fire Station Now Serving Your Neighborhood

You now have a modern fire station serving your area. The City of Grand Rapids has opened the new Division Avenue Fire Station—Station No. 10—at 1823 Division Avenue South, giving firefighters a safer, more efficient space to respond to emergencies and support the community.

The station is a $12 million, 18,900 square foot facility built to serve your neighborhood for the next 75 to 100 years. It includes private dorm rooms, updated kitchen and dining areas, drive through apparatus bays, officers' quarters and a fitness room. These improvements help firefighters stay prepared, comfortable and ready to respond when you need them most.

Station No. 10 was designed by Integrated Architecture and built by EV Construction. Its location between Elm and Rose Streets provides better access to surrounding neighborhoods, which will help reduce emergency response times.

Fire Chief Brad Brown says the new station strengthens the City's commitment to public safety. "This new facility reflects our commitment to strengthening public safety and investing in the future of our neighborhoods," he said. "We're proud to open a station that will support both our firefighters and the residents who depend on us every day."

The Division Avenue Fire Station marks an important investment in your community—one that will help protect residents and support firefighters for decades to come.

City Brings License Plate Reader System Under Surveillance Policy

You'll see stronger safeguards around police technology this fall as the City of Grand Rapids moves its automated license plate reader system under the City's Surveillance Technology Policy. City Manager Mark Washington announced that an administrative order taking effect in mid September will require any future purchase, renewal or expansion of the system to go through Public Safety Committee review and City Commission approval.

This change brings the system—often called ALPRs—into the same oversight process used for other surveillance tools. The goal is to boost transparency and strengthen community trust as the technology continues to evolve.

GRPD has used license plate readers for more than 10 years. The City first approved the system in 2012, which was three years before the Surveillance Technology Policy existed. Because the tools were already in use, upgrades were treated as replacements and not subject to the policy. The new administrative order updates that approach.

Washington said the shift reflects what you and City leaders have been asking for: clear oversight and stronger rules. "We want a community safe from criminal activity but also respect people's right to reasonable privacy," he said.

Mayor David LaGrand said the move aligns with the City's values. "Our city government is committed to transparency and accountability," he said. "Placing license plate readers under our Surveillance Policy lets us limit their use, maintain public review and balance personal freedom with community safety."

During an Aug. 25 presentation, GRPD explained how ALPRs help with cases involving homicides, stolen vehicles, violent offenders and missing people. The department noted that searches are audited, most data is kept for only 30 days, and the system already blocks certain uses, including immigration related searches, reproductive health related searches, facial recognition, audio monitoring and live video feeds.

Washington emphasized that the policy change isn't a criticism of the technology or the officers who use it. "It shows we value technology and are not afraid of transparent rules that explain how we use advanced tools," he said.

What the Administrative Order Does

The order:

- Applies all oversight and reporting rules in the City's Surveillance Technology Policy to any future purchase, renewal or expansion of ALPR systems.
- Allows the 31 existing license plate readers to continue operating, but require review and approval before contracts are renewed.
- Requires compliance with the Surveillance Technology Policy if GRPD activates new features or expands the system before current contracts end.
- Defines prohibited uses of ALPR technology consistent with laws and City policies.
- Accepts GRPD's Aug. 25 presentation as the 2026 annual report, with regular reporting starting in 2027.

Under Administrative Policy 15 03, the Public Safety Committee and City Commission must review any proposed surveillance technology, assess privacy and civil liberties impacts, hold a public hearing, and complete a fiscal review before approving new tools. The Office of Oversight and Public Accountability continues to provide community facing reports.

"Our objectives are simple," Washington said. "We want a safe community, effective policing tools and public trust that those tools follow clear rules and strong oversight."

If you want to learn more about the Surveillance Technology Policy or upcoming reviews, visit grandrapidsmi.gov.



Seasonal Parking Rules Begin Nov. 1

As fall settles in, you'll see seasonal parking rules return to many neighborhood streets starting Sunday, Nov. 1. These rules help City street sweepers and snowplows clear leaves, tree debris and snow so your streets stay safer and easier to travel all winter long. They also help keep one lane open for traffic, including emergency vehicles and public service crews.

Public Works Director John Gorney says your cooperation is key. "We need the community's help as we work to clear streets of leaves and other tree debris that naturally fall into the road," he said. "Following the parking restrictions allows us to effectively clean the streets and ensures we don't have flooded streets this winter due to clogged catch basins."

Seasonal parking rules take effect at 12:01 a.m. on Nov. 1 every year—no matter the weather—and stay in place until April 1.

How Odd–Even Parking Works

- On even numbered days from 1 a.m. to 6 p.m., you must park on the even numbered side of the street.
- On odd numbered days from 1 a.m. to 6 p.m., you must park on the odd numbered side of the street.
- From 6 p.m. to 1 a.m., you may park on either side unless signs say otherwise.

How Same Side Parking Works

Some narrow streets have same side parking rules, meaning you must park only on the designated side from Nov. 1 to April 1. A few streets do not allow parking at all. Look for posted signs on your block.

Avoid a Ticket

Mobile GR says vehicles parked in violation of these rules may be ticketed. Enforcement begins on Nov. 1 regardless of snow conditions, so be sure to read signs carefully to avoid a $20 parking ticket.

How to Report a Parking Issue

- Use the grcity 311 app
- Report online at grandrapidsmi.gov/living in gr/311-customer-service/report-an-issue
- Call 311 or 616.456.3000 anytime

For a map of streets with odd even or one side parking restrictions, visit the City's website.

COMMISSION NIGHT OUT

Join Your Neighbors at Commission Night Out on Nov. 17

You have a chance to connect with your City leaders and explore a brand new community space at the final Commission Night Out of the year. The event happens Tuesday, Nov. 17 at 7 p.m. at the new MLK Park Community Center in the Third Ward. Doors open at 6 p.m., giving you time to arrive early, meet staff and look around the building.

Before the City Commission meeting begins, you can browse information tables and learn about City programs, services and upcoming projects. You'll also get to tour the new MLK Park Community Center, which was shaped through neighborhood input and designed to serve residents of all ages. Inside, you'll find multipurpose rooms, a full gym with multi use sports courts, rentable event space, an updated pool house, an expanded parking lot, a fitness loop with outdoor exercise equipment and a relocated playground that offers a safer and more accessible spot for families.

Commission Night Out is meant to bring City government directly to you. It creates a welcoming place where you can learn how decisions are made, talk with City Commissioners and staff, ask questions and see how your voice influences City work. Light snacks will be available.

Parking is offered in the MLK Park lot and along nearby neighborhood streets.

If you can't attend in person, the Commission meeting will air on Xfinity Channel 26 and stream live on the City's Facebook and YouTube pages.

This event is a great chance to connect and see the new community center in action

Meet Your Community Police Officers

You now have more dedicated support in your neighborhood thanks to the Grand Rapids Police Department's (GRPD's) growing Community Police Officer (CPO) program. GRPD reinstated the CPO role in 2025, assigning one officer to each service area – Central, East, North End, South and West Side. As of September, the department added three more officers to strengthen its presence across the city.

Here's a look at the officers serving each part of the city:

Central Service Area



Officer Patrick Martin
pmartin@grcity.us

Service Area Message Line: 616-456-4525

Officer Martin has spent 12 years with GRPD. When he's not working, he enjoys traveling across the U.S. and abroad – and loves trying new foods wherever he goes.



Officer Christopher Watkins
(NEW as of September)
cwatkins@grcity.us

Service Area Message Line: 616-456-4525

Officer Watkins brings more than 25 years of law enforcement experience, including five years in Grand Rapids. He's also a field training officer with a background in firearms and tactics instruction. Off duty, he's usually working on his Jeep or rewatching the Lord of the Rings movies. His favorite part of policing is that each day is different.

East Service Area



Officer Austin Highlen
ahighlen@grcity.us

Service Area Message Line: 616-456-4524

Officer Highlen has nearly six years with GRPD, working patrol in both East and North. Before joining the department, he was an officer in Indiana and served as a K9 handler. He's a regular triathlon and marathon competitor and is currently reading Start with Why by Simon Sinek.

North End Service Area



Officer Andrew Smith
asmith@grcity.us

Service Area Message Line: 616-456-4526

Officer Smith has been with GRPD for five years. He also advises the GRPD Explorer program*, which introduces young adults to policing careers – a program he participated in back in 2015. He enjoys downhill skiing and is glad to live in a place where snow makes that easy.

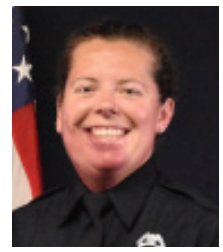
*Learn more about the Explorer program at joingrpd.com.

South Service Area



Officer Nia King
(NEW as of September)

Officer King has served as a GRPD officer for 12 years and worked as a police cadet for three years before that. She recently transitioned from the Community Engagement Unit into the CPO role and is excited to serve in the South Service Area, where she grew up. Outside of work, she enjoys reading, staying active and spending time with her extended family. Go Green! Go White!



Officer Roxanne Partak
rpartak@grcity.us

Service Area Message Line: 616-456-4527

Officer Partak has six years with GRPD. She serves on both the crisis negotiations and peer support teams. Kids in the neighborhood know her as "Officer Roxy," and she remains a devoted fan of Detroit sports – heartbreak and all.

West Side Service Area



Officer Drake Schut
(NEW as of September)
dschut@grcity.us

Service Area Message Line: 616-456-4528

Officer Schut has eight years with GRPD. On his family's small farm, he raises Texas longhorns and he also trains in jiu jitsu.



Officer Leon White
lwhite@grcity.us

Service Area Message Line: 616-456-4528

Officer White has five years with the department. He enjoys watching movies and is already excited for Dune 3 and Avengers: Doomsday to arrive in December. He also coaches high school sports and loves hiking – his favorite so far is Angel's Landing in Utah. When he's home, he makes a great penne alla vodka.

If you ever need to reach your CPO, you can call the service area message line listed for your neighborhood or email your officer directly. Your CPO is here to support you, answer questions and help make your neighborhood a safer and more connected place to live.

Your CPO is your direct connection to GRPD. These officers work with residents, neighborhood groups, businesses and local organizations to address street level issues, support safety and connect you to other City departments and social service partners. They are a consistent, visible presence aimed at helping you solve problems before they grow.

City Seeks Artist Proposals for Gun Violence Memorial

You may have heard that the City of Grand Rapids is creating a new memorial to honor people whose lives have been impacted by gun violence. This fall, the City issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) inviting artists to design a piece that helps the community heal, reflect and come together.

The memorial will recognize the many forms of gun violence affecting families and neighborhoods, including domestic violence, interpersonal conflict, street violence and unjust shootings. The City hopes the final artwork will offer a meaningful place where you and your neighbors can gather, remember loved ones and encourage conversations about safety and prevention.

Brandon Davis, managing director of the Office of Public Accountability and the Office of Equity and Engagement, says the memorial is meant to give the community a place to reflect. He believes the artwork will serve as a reminder of the losses felt across Grand Rapids while also inspiring continued dialogue around building safer neighborhoods.

SAFE
Safe Alliances for Everyone

Latesha Lipscomb, the City's civilian violence prevention and intervention manager, says the impact of gun violence lasts for years. "The pain doesn't end with one incident," she said. "It echoes through families, friends and communities. This memorial will create a sacred space where our city can honor those experiences and continue the long work of healing."

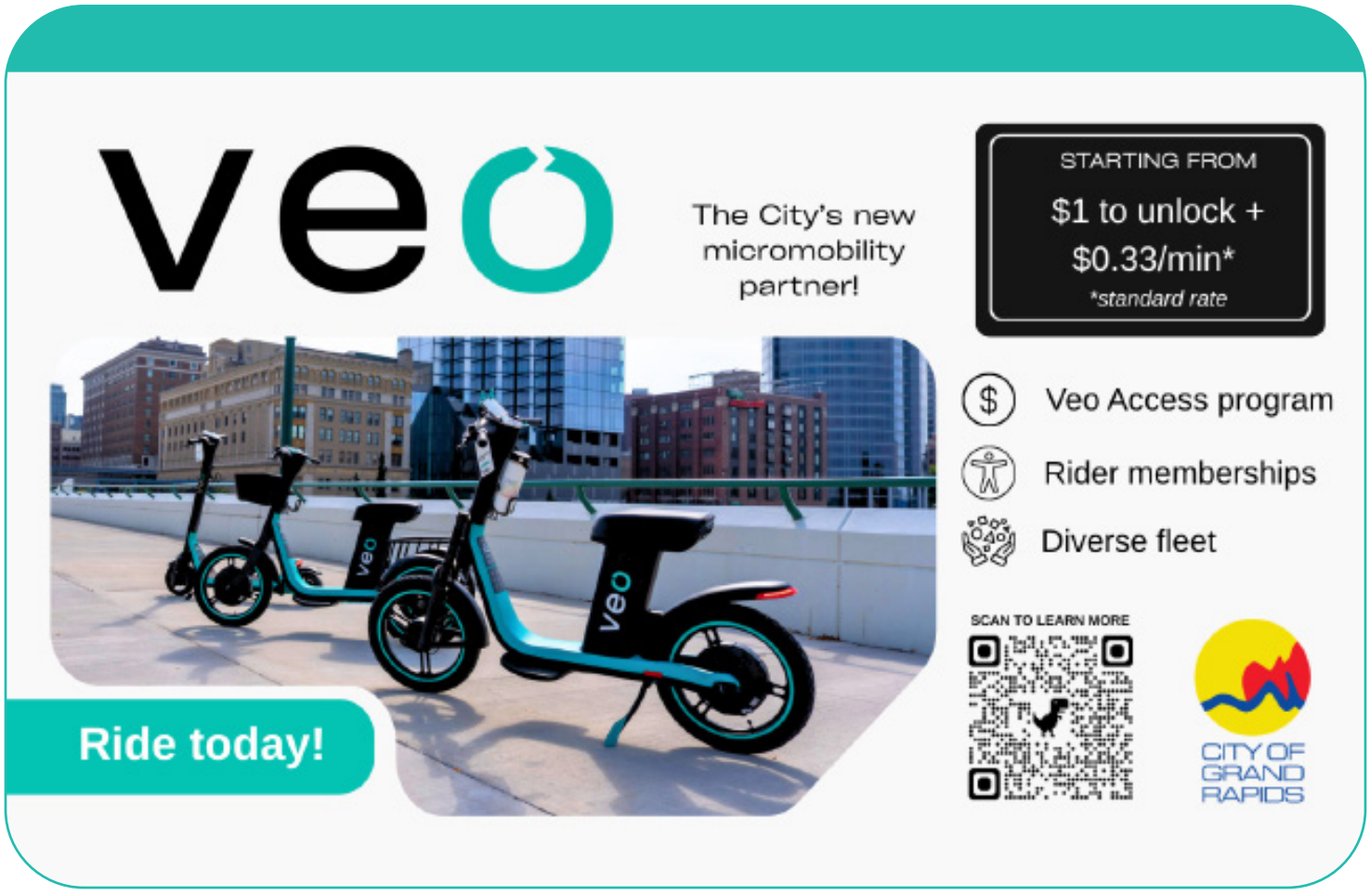
What Artists Were Asked to Create

Artists were invited to propose a three dimensional or mixed media piece that can be displayed indoors or outdoors. The sculpture must be durable and able to be delivered and installed by two people. Proposals also needed to include a base, a storage container and installation instructions. When finished, the artwork will become City property.

A selection committee of survivors, families affected by gun violence, SAFE Task Force members and representatives from the Grand Rapids Police Department is reviewing all proposals. The committee will recommend the option that best reflects the community's experiences and the goals of the project.

The project budget is capped at $20,000, covering all materials, labor and related costs.

This memorial is one step in the City's ongoing effort to support healing and create safer spaces for everyone. As the project moves forward, you'll see more updates about how the memorial will take shape and how it will honor the stories and lives of neighbors across Grand Rapids



Shape the Future of Southside Creekways Trails

The City continues its work on the Southside Creekways project. This long-term initiative focuses on exploring what could one day be possible along the Silver Creek and Plaster Creek corridors. The project is centered on gathering community input and developing concepts for a future connected trail and greenway system that may support recreation, mobility and quality of life for you and your neighbors.

The Southside Creekways project aims to build safe, accessible routes that link parks, schools, neighborhoods and business districts across the Southside. The vision is a trail network that makes it easier for you to walk, bike or roll between destinations while enjoying new greenspaces and restored natural areas near the creeks.

A Community Leadership Team made up of local residents and business representatives is helping guide the project. The team works alongside City staff, design consultants, and community partners to identify project goals, explore early route options and ensure that neighborhood voices shape every major decision.

The project focuses on several priorities including improving trail connections, creating more outdoor recreation spaces, strengthening local businesses, supporting environmental health, and reflecting the culture and identity of Southside neighborhoods. It also looks at ways to restore creek habitat, fill gaps in the existing Plaster Creek Trail and explore new options where the Silver Creek corridor is currently underground.

To stay informed about upcoming engagement opportunities or learn more about the project's goals, visit publicinput.com/southsidecreekways.

This project will help shape a stronger, more connected trail system in southeast Grand Rapids — one that reflects your neighborhood's needs, values and vision for the future.

Renew GR Offers Easy Way to Compost Your Food Scraps

You can now help reduce waste and support a healthier environment through Renew Grand Rapids, the City's food scrap composting program. The program gives you simple, secure access to compost bins placed across all three wards, making it easier than ever to keep food scraps out of landfills.

How the Program Works

Renew Grand Rapids lets you drop off food scraps at seven convenient locations:

- Ward One: Lincoln Park, Garfield Park, Public Services Center
- Ward Two: Fulton Street Farmer's Market, Riverside Park
- Ward Three: MLK Park, MacKay-Jaycees Park

You sign up through the City's app or website. Once enrolled, you unlock the bins using Bluetooth on your phone. If you don't have a smartphone, you can use a keypad to open any bin. When you select a bin in the app and tap "open," you'll have 25 seconds to deposit your food scraps.

The bins stay locked to prevent contamination, and compost made from your food scraps will be returned to residents at no cost.

Why It Matters

Food scraps make up a large portion of the waste produced in Grand Rapids. When they end up in landfills, they create methane, a climate warming gas. By using Renew Grand Rapids, you help cut emissions and give organic material a second life as nutrient rich compost.

Residents across the city helped choose bin locations, ensuring they are easy to reach and placed where people want them. Any City resident can participate, and the program is free.

Get Help if You Need It

If you want support getting started or learning how to use the bins, Public Works staff offer open hours at 1500 Scribner Avenue NW on Mondays and Wednesdays from Aug. 24 through Sept. 9. You can also call 311 for assistance.

You may choose to use Kent County's food scrap program as well. Both options work through the same app, giving you flexibility.

You can enroll or learn more at engage.grandrapidsmi.gov/renewgr or by calling 616 456 3000 or 311. Renew Grand Rapids gives you a simple way to take climate action and support a cleaner, greener community—one food scrap at a time.



GRAND RAPIDS VITAL STREETS

COMPLETE STREETS + GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS

Vital Streets Grand Rapids *provides a framework for designing a network of* ***city streets and rights-of-way*** *that are* ***accessible, attractive, multimodal and safe****.*

Vital Streets serve all people of our community, contributing to the livability of our neighborhoods and business districts, protecting the quality of our river, and increasing economic opportunity.



11 MILES OF SIDEWALK GAPS CLOSED

since 2015, the City of **Grand Rapids has undertaken the cost** of these projects, previously a resident expense, **closing the gaps of more than 11 miles of sidewalk systems** citywide



2,296 PROJECTS: 696 MILES OF CITY STREETS

since 2015, the City of Grand Rapids has concluded nearly **2,300 individual projects** and **almost 700 miles of streets**, totaling more than **$256 million in Vital Streets** construction



INTENTIONAL INVESTMENTS

WITH BALANCE & DISTRIBUTION EQUAL BETWEEN ALL 3 WARDS

through 2031, the Vital Streets Program will **balance the investment amount across the three wards** in Grand Rapids, totaling more than **$396 million** in repairs and upgrades

grandrapidsmi.gov/vitalstreetsgr

Your Neighbors Bring Big Ideas to Life with Neighborhood Match Fund Support

You'll see more community building projects across Grand Rapids this fall thanks to the Neighborhood Match Fund (NMF). The City awarded more than $76,000 to help 25 resident led projects that strengthen neighborhood ties and create welcoming spaces where you can connect with others.

The Neighborhood Match Fund supports projects led by residents, block clubs and local nonprofits. Grants range from $500 to $5,000, and you match the City's support with volunteer time, donated goods or cash.

Community juries reviewed each idea to make sure it fit these goals. Once selected, project leads worked with the NMF team to finalize their plans and choose outreach strategies that welcome as many neighbors as possible.

Projects Happening Across the City

This fall's NMF projects bring people together in all kinds of creative ways. Here are just some of the efforts taking place:

- A community picnic at Garfield Park where you can learn, share resources and meet new neighbors.
- A Snow Angel Project that connects volunteers with seniors and residents who need help clearing sidewalks this winter.
- A Honduran Independence Dinner celebrating food, music and heritage.
- Trunk or Treat events, fall festivals and Halloween gatherings that give families safe, fun places to celebrate.
- Workshops that help you learn about civic rights, financial skills, wellness and more.
- Art classes, mural painting parties and youth concerts that highlight local talent.
- Block parties across Midtown, Eastown and other neighborhoods that help you meet the people who live closest to you.
- Support programs for survivors of human trafficking and residents seeking expungement fee assistance.
- Events designed to strengthen men's mental health, welcome new neighbors and build community pride.

Every project shares one goal: helping you feel connected, supported and valued in your neighborhood.

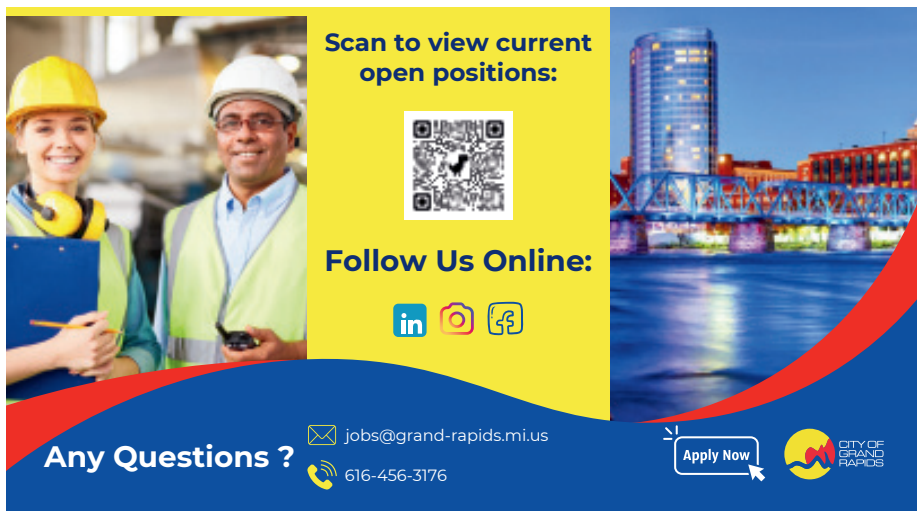
How You Can Apply

If you have an idea that brings people together, you can apply for the next round of NMF funding from Dec. 1 to Dec. 31. Projects will run from March through August.

To apply, you must:

- Live in Grand Rapids or be part of a neighborhood group or local nonprofit.
- Provide a match equal to the grant amount using volunteer time, donated materials or cash.
- Plan a project that's free, open to the public and focused on community building, resident leadership or social justice.

You can learn more at grandrapidsmi.gov/nmf or email nmf@grcity.us.





Phase Zero Pilot Helps Local Musicians Build Small Businesses

You may have seen more live music around Ward 3 this past month, and it was part of something new. The City of Grand Rapids launched the Phase Zero pilot to help local musicians build real small business foundations and take part in the City's vendor system. The pilot is part of the Cultural Business Enterprise (CBE) Initiative, which recognizes musicians as micro business owners through the City's existing MLBE certification program.

Through Phase Zero, 15 to 18 musicians earned CBE certification and were paid as City vendors for free public performances on Sept. 26. These shows were part of a test run to see how live performances can strengthen neighborhoods, increase foot traffic and support future investment in the creative economy. By using performances as the core of the pilot, the City can learn what works well and how the model might grow in other areas.

How Musicians Connect With Phase Zero

If you're a musician, you connect with the pilot through the Michigan Music Alliance, the City's partner for artist certification and support. The Alliance helps you meet MLBE requirements, including setting up an LLC, registering as a City vendor, being based in Kent County and meeting basic tax guidelines. After you complete certification, you join the CBE cohort and become eligible for paid performances during future pilot windows.

Amaad Hardy, business developer with the Office of Equity and Engagement, encourages musicians to get involved. "We want local musicians and live performers to see themselves as small businesses with real opportunities in Grand Rapids," Hardy said. "Phase Zero gives artists a simple path into the City's vendor system. If you're a musician looking to grow, this is the time to connect with the Michigan Music Alliance and take advantage of this pilot."

A Coordinated Public Investment

The pilot includes a $50,000 investment through the Third Ward Equity Fund. Southtown CIA provided $30,000 for SouthPrize programming and venue activation, while the Office of Equity and Engagement invested $20,000 to support certification, artist pay and project coordination.

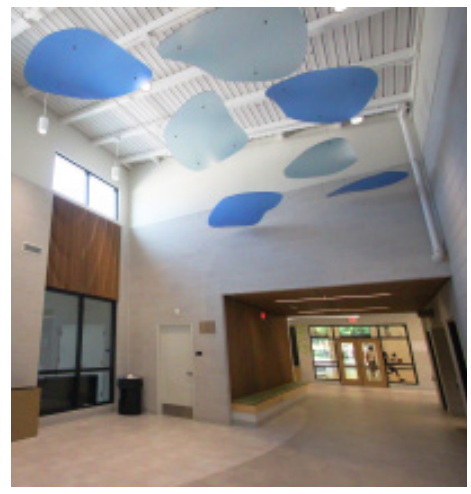
"It's important for us to help formalize our local creative economy," said Alvin (AJ) Hills IV, equal business opportunity program and river equity manager. "For people wondering what this effort will become, think about the live music scenes in Nashville or Austin. This is the first step toward building a vibrant music and performance ecosystem here in Grand Rapids."

What Comes Next

The City will now study what worked well with Phase Zero and share results with the Economic Development Project Team. This information will help shape a possible citywide expansion in 2027, opening the door for visual artists, performers and other creative workers to join the CBE program.



MLK Park Community Center Earns LEED Silver, Showing City's Commitment to Sustainability



Photos by Amanda G. Ramsey

MLK Park Community Center Earns LEED Silver, Showing City's Commitment to Sustainability

The MLK Park Community Center now stands as one of Grand Rapids' newest examples of energy-efficient, community-focused design. The facility has earned LEED Silver certification, a national standard that recognizes buildings built to save resources and support healthier environments.

You see the results of this work throughout the nearly 25,000-square-foot center. The City planned the space with energy-saving systems, low-impact materials and features meant to operate efficiently for years. Its walkable location and access to public transit make it easier for you to visit without relying on a car.

The design helps manage stormwater on site, with green infrastructure holding about 90% of rainwater from major storms. The landscaping needs no irrigation, and indoor water use is reduced by 44%. The building is expected to save 21% on energy costs. CO2 sensors support healthy air quality, while all-LED lighting and lighting controls cut energy use even further. The center also follows sustainability policies for purchasing, waste and green cleaning.

City Chief Sustainability Officer Annabelle Wilkinson says the project reflects Grand Rapids' core value of sustainability. She says decisions like this support long-term benefits for the climate, the community and the city budget.

The center, built as part of a $19.75 million investment in Martin Luther King Park, replaces the former lodge and offers a full gym, fitness studio, community rooms and a rentable event space. Years of neighborhood engagement, starting with the MLK Park Neighborhood Quality of Life Study, helped create a design that supports year-round recreation and honors the neighborhood's identity.

The LEED Silver certification marks another step in this community-driven effort. It highlights a building designed to serve residents today while operating more sustainably into the future.

Unity Park Brings New Gathering Space to Roosevelt Park Neighborhood

When you visit Roosevelt Park now, you see a new space built for you and your neighbors. Unity Park, a $2.23 million public project, is designed to reflect the culture, history and priorities of the surrounding community.

You'll find the park at 680 Cesar E. Chavez Avenue SW. Its design preserves important community stories while creating new places where you can play, gather or relax.

The park features a welcoming area with vendor spaces and a flexible gathering zone. You can explore inclusive play areas with hammock groves, community seating and elements built for people of all ages and abilities. Café-style seating under a shaded tree grove offers a calm spot to sit and enjoy the outdoors.

Unity Park also focuses on environmental sustainability. A rain garden and expanded tree canopy support stormwater management and add green space. Upgraded lighting, designated bike paths and drinking fountains with bottle-filling stations improve safety and accessibility throughout the site.

Funding came from the Michigan Enhancement Grant and the Parks Capital Fund. Many community partners contributed to the project, including neighborhood organizations, nonprofits, educators, planners and health and housing groups.

As you walk through Unity Park, you see a space created for you and shaped by the people who call Roosevelt Park home. Community members are encouraged to visit, explore and enjoy this vibrant addition to the neighborhood.



City of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation

FALL CLASSES & PROGRAMS

Registration is open for fall classes and activities with GR Parks and Recreation! From family-friendly activities like tae-kwon-do, to sports clinics and activities for youth, to pickleball and fitness classes for adults, GR Parks & Rec is your place to keep moving this fall.

To learn more and register for classes, please visit the GR Parks and Recreation online recreation catalog at grparks.info/reccatalog.

For additional recreation offerings, information about the MLK Community Center and more, please visit the department's website at grparks.info/home.

MLK PARK COMMUNITY CENTER

Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation is excited to provide free (for City residents) and low-cost programming and community events at MLK Park Community Center. Specialty programs and events are listed below with additional offerings in the adult and youth sections.

Pickleball

MLK Park Community Center has dedicated pickleball hours each week.

All Skill Levels:

- Mondays through Thursdays: 12 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.
- Fridays: 9:30 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Beginner-Friendly Play:

- Fridays, 12:00 - 2:30 p.m.

Location: MLK Park Community Center (900 Fuller Ave SE)

Men's 3-on-3 Basketball League

This recreational league offers a fun, fast-paced, and social basketball experience for aduls of all skill levels. Games are played in a half-court, 3-on-3 format that emphasizes teamwork, quick play, and an enjoyable atmosphere. Teams will compete in weekly matchups, with standings recorded throughout the season and a playoff tournament to crown the league champion. This league provides a welcoming and energetic environment for everyone. Teams will play two games each week for six weeks, followed by a single-elimination tournament. Recommended roster size is 5 people.

Ages: 18 and up

Dates: Mondays, Nov. 2 to Dec. 14

Cost: $320

Social Pickleball Tournament

This tournament is all about meeting new people, learning the game, and enjoying a great day on the courts. Whether you're picking up a paddle for the first time or simply looking for a relaxed way to play, this event celerbates fun, teamwork, and the joy of being active together. Expect plenty of laughs, easygoing matchups, and a supportive environment where the emphasis is on connecting rather than competing.

This is a non-sanctioned, non-DUPR tournament. This lighthearted, community-focused event is designed for players of all abilities. Players must register individually and arrive with a partner.

Ages: 18 and up

Dates: Saturday, Nov. 21 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Cost: $40

Social Volleyball Tournament

Join us for a full day of fun, competition, and community! This one-day event is designed for recreational playwer who enjoy a lively, upbeat environment and friendly matches. Whether you're building team chemistry, representing your workplace, or just getting friends together, this tournament offers a great mix of play, energy, and social connection.

Ages: 18 and up

Dates: Saturday, Dec. 12 from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Cost: $120

AQUATICS

Youth Swim Lessons

Our swim lessons start at six months old with a parent and continue through age 14 with four different levels, giving young swimmers a supportive place to learn essential skills and grow at their own pace.

Ages: 6 months (with a parent) to 14

Dates: Multiple sessons from June into August

Location: Briggs Park, MLK Park, Richmond Park

Cost: $45 for residents, $55 for nonresidents



FITNESS GOLD (FREE PROGRAM)

Open to all adults ages 18 and up but designed with ages 50+ in mind, Fitness Gold offers a variety of lower impact fitness classes and social outings each month. Classes are held at MLK Park Community Center. The schedule varies month to month and updates are available at the link in the next column or in person at the community center.

Classes include Zumba Gold, Pilates, ballroom dancing, barre, cardio & strength, and more. No advanced registration needed. Classes are free for Grand Rapids City residents. Non-residents are $5.

Calendars are available for download at **grparks.info/fitnessgold.**

Ballroom Dancing

A beginner class for those wanting to learn ballroom dancing including salsa, waltz, tango, foxtrot, East Cost Swing, cha cha, and rumba.

Dates: Tuesdays in October

Time: 11:00-11:45 a.m.

Location: MLK Park Community Center (900 Fuller Ave SE)

Barre

Barre is a low impact, high-intensity total body workout set to fun, upbeat music that incorporates elements of Pilates, ballet, and yoga. This class uses light handweights, resistance bands, and your own body weight to build strength and endurance, then stretches everything out to increase your flexibility. Barre is a great workout for any fitness level.

Dates: Tuesdays in October

Time: 10:00-10:50 a.m.

Location: MLK Park Community Center (900 Fuller Ave SE)

Cardio & Strength Low Impact Workout

This workout provides aerobic benefits and improves mobility and strength. Handweights and resistance bands are used. Bring your yoga mat.

Dates: Mondays in October

Time: 10:00-10:50 a.m.

Location: MLK Park Community Center (900 Fuller Ave SE)

Pilates (Low Impact)

Tone muscles, improve posture, and learn flexibility and balance. Focus on moving as one unit with control and grace. Improve circulation and endurance while reducing stress. Limited number of mats available.

Dates: Mondays and Thursdays in October

Time: 11:00-11:50 a.m.

Location: MLK Park Community Center (900 Fuller Ave SE)

Senior Strength

Senior Strength offers a welcoming, supportive environment to help you feel stronger, more confident, and energized in daily life. This is a low-impact fitness class designed to help build and maintain strength, improve balance, and support overall wellness using dumbbells, resistance bands, and simple body movements, with a focus on increasing muscle tone, joint stability, and coordination.

Dates: Thursdays in October

Time: 10:00-10:50 a.m.

Location: MLK Park Community Center (900 Fuller Ave SE)

Stretch & Flex Fitness

This class begins in a chair and works on increasing strength, balance, and flexibility while using light handweights.

Dates: Wednesdays & Fridays in October

Time: 11:10 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Location: MLK Park Community Center (900 Fuller Ave SE)

Zumba Gold

Zumba Gold is a Latin-based dance fitness class which uses easy-to-follow choreography focusing on balance, range of motion, and coordination.

Dates: Wednesdays in October

Time: 10:00-10:50 a.m.

Location: MLK Park Community Center (900 Fuller Ave SE)

ADULT CLASSES (Ages 18+)

Advanced registration is required for these classes. Classes are open to Grand Rapids City residents and non-residents. Learn more and register at grparks.info/recclasses or call 616.456.3696 for assistance.

Ballroom Dancing

A beginner class targeted toward couples wanting to learn ballroom dancing. Learn the Salsa, Foxtrot, East Coast Swing, Cha Cha, Rumba and Tango. This class is for couples. Each person is required to register.

Dates: Tuesdays, Nov. 10 to Dec. 15

Location: Riverside Studio @ 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $36 for residents, $46 for nonresidents

Line Dancing

Enjoy line dancing while exercising mind, body, and spirit to a variety of music genres. All levels welcome, no experience needed.

Dates: Mondays, Nov. 9 to Dec. 21

Location: MLK Park Community Center (900 Fuller Ave SE)

Cost: $36 for residents, $46 for nonresidents

WERQ

WERQ is a nonstop cardio dance class with fun and unique routines set to the hottest pop and hip hop music. Participants will get a high calorie burn and a non-stop workout combining repretitive athletic moves with dance steps. Anyone can WERQ it!

Dates: Wednesdays, Nov. 11 to Dec. 16

Location: Riverside Studio @ 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $36 for residents, $46 for nonresidents

Barre

Barre is a low impact, high intensity total body workout that incorporates elements of Pilates, ballet, and yoga. Set to fun, upbeat music, this class uses light hand weights, resistance bands, and your own body weight to complete range movements at high repetitions to fatigue your muscles and build strength and endurance. Stretching is also incorporated to increase flexibility. Great for all fitness levels!

Dates: Multiple class options; Nov. 10 to Dec. 19

Location: 1500 Scribner Ave studios and MLK Park Community Center (900 Fuller Ave Se)

Cost: $31/36 for residents, $41/46for nonresidents

Barre Strength

Barre Strength incorporates strength training with traditional barre, using medium to heavy dumbbells and full-body combinations to improve overall strength, then finishing each series with small, controlled movements performed in high repetition to challenge endurance, control, and stability. Class ends on the mat, using weights to progress barr and Pilates-inspired movements. Through intentional repretition


CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS
Parks & Recreation
REGISTRATION OPENS NOV. 2
HOLIDAY
FITNESS CLASSES
Zumba • Strength & Power • Virtual Yoga
Register on Nov. 2 at: grparks.info/recclasses


MLK PARK COMMUNITY CENTER
ADULT LEAGUES
& TOURNAMENTS
REGISTRAION NOW OPEN:
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CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS
Parks & Recreation

and upbeat music, you'll elevate your heart rate, build strength, improve endurance, and enhance overall fitness and daily function.

Dates: Mondays, Nov. 9 to Dec. 114

Location: Riverside Studio @ 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $36 for residents, $46 for nonresidents

Cycle & Strength

A combination of high-intensity cycling intervals followed by full-body strength exercises that target muscle groups in the arms, abs, and lower back.

Dates: Tuesdays, Nov. 10 through Dec. 15

Location: Ford Studio @ 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $36 for residents, $46 for nonresidents

Cycling

Reach your fitness goals while building leg and core strength. Powerful music and pace-setting instruction helps you climb steep hills, move across flat road, and master intense cycling intervals.

Dates: Mondays, Nov. 9 to Dec. 14

Location: Ford Studio @ 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $36 for residents, $46 for nonresidents

Guitar Lessons with Riverside Guitar School

Are you curious about the guitar but unsure about lessons or committing to a session? Try a short, no-pressure introduction with four group classes or private lessons at Riverside Guitar School.

After you register, Riverside Guitar School will contact you to schedule a time that works for you. A guitar will be provided to use during lessons.

This offer may be used only once per person. If you'd like to continue after the four lessons, Riverside Guitar School will be happy to discuss ongoing options with you.

Ages: 4 and up

Dates: Year-round

Cost: $68 for residents, $78 for nonresidents

HIGH Low (HIGH Fitness)

A lower impact (not intensity!) workout, HIGH Low is the sister format to HIGH Fitness. Offering impact progressions for every move, HIGH Low is a steady state cardio workout tailored to the individual, by the individual. Highly adaptable to all fitness levels, this lower impact format focuses on the same elements of the HIGH brand: fun, fabulous music, and a community-based inclusive environment!

Dates: Thursdays, Nov. 12 to Dec. 17

Location: Riverside Studio @ 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $31 for residents, $41 for nonresidents

Kettlebell AMPD

Kettlebell AMPD is a group fitness format that takes heart-pumping music and kettlebell moves and combines them into a calorie torching fun workout! The program uses lightweight kettlebells in both traditional and non-traditional ways to create an effective full body workout. Combining the benefits of strength training, functional movements, and cardiovascular exercises, this program is a safe and effective workout for all ages and fitness levels.

Dates: Thursdays, Nov. 12 to Dec. 17

Location: Riverside Studio @ 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $31 for residents, $41 for nonresidents

Human Reformer Pilates

Human Reformer is a mat-based Pilates class that replicates the Pilates Reformer using resistance bands, delivering its benefits through focused core strengthening, improved alignment, and enhanced total-body control. This low-impact class uses scalable resistance to provide a challenging yet adaptable full-body workout suitable for all fitness levels.

Dates: Tuesdays, Nov. 10 to Dec. 15

Location: Ford Studio @ 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $36 for residents, $46 for nonresidents

Pilates

Tone muscles, improve posture, and learn flexibility and balance. Focus on moving as one unit with control and grace. Improve circulation and endurance and reduce stress. Resistance bands, pilates balls, and pilates rings are used during class. All exercises are done a mat.

Dates: Wednesdays, Nov. 11 to Dec. 16

Location: MLK Park Community Center

Cost: $36 for residents, $46 for nonresidents

POUND

Using Ripstix (available for use during class) - lightly weighted drumsticks engineered specifically for exercising - POUND transforms drumming into an effective full-body workout. Become the music in this class that combines cardio, conditioning, and strength training with yoga and pilates-inspired movements. This class is designed for all fitness levels and is easily modifiable.

Dates: Thursdays, Nov. 12 to Dec. 17

Location: Ford Studio @ 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $31 for residents, $41 for nonresidents

Pumped Up Strength

This resistance training workout uses medium to heavy dumbbells to build lean muscle, boost metabolism, and enhance total-body strength. Through progressive layering and compound movement patterns, each class targets every major muscle group within a structured, beat-driven format that will keep you engaged, challenged, and progressing.

Dates: Multiple class options, Nov. 10 to Dec. 16

Location: 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $36 for residents, $46 for nonresidents

Strength & Row Circuit

This high intensity class will improve endurance and strength through a mix of rowing distances and strength training circuits.

Dates: Multiple classes, Nov. 9 to Dec. 17

Location: Riverside Studio @ 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $31/36 for residents, $41/46 for nonresidents

Strength & Power

This strength class will work all your muscle groups with a variety of exercises to elevate your current routine. It combines compound exercises to engage as many muscles as possible in a single move, as well as incorporate isolation moves. Modifcations and challenges will be offered to make the class appropriate for all levels.

Dates: Multiple classes, Nov. 9 to Dec. 18

Location: Riverside Studio @ 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $31/36 for residents, $41/46 for nonresidents

Tae Kwon Do (Ages 7+)

Discover the fundamentals of Tae Kwon Do, the dynamic Korean martial art that emphasizes flexibility, concentration, balance, and self-defense. Under the guidance of a skilled instructor, participants will:

- Improve physical fitness and flexibility
- Enhance focus and mental discipline
- Develop balance and coordination
- Learn practical self-defense techniques
- Build confidence and self-respect

This class is perfect for kids, adults of all ages, and even families looking for a fun and empowering activity to do together. Whether you're a beginning

or looking to sharpen your skills, Tae Kwon Do offers something for everyone!

Dates: Tuesdays, Nov. 3 to Dec. 15

Location: MLK Park Community Center

Cost: $40 for residents, $50 for non-residents

Total Body Power

This full-body workout focuses on major muscle groups, including the core, with bursts of cardio to leave you feeling strong and confident. A variety of equipment may be used including dumbbells, resistance bands, Pilates balls, yoga blocks, and body weight.

Dates: Tuesdays, Nov. 10 to Dec. 15

Location: Riverside Studio @ 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $36 for residents, $46 for nonresidents

Tumbling

Learn new skills, revisit old ones, or challenge yourself with tumbling, handstands, balances, flexibility, strength, and body control. All experience levels welcome!

Dates: Mondays, Nov. 9 to Dec. 14

Location: Garfield Park Community Gym

Cost: $50 for residents, $60 for nonresidents

Yoga (Basic)

Discover your inner yogi in a class that builds strength and body awareness. Class will begin with gentle movement and breathing, progressing to standing sequences and finally ending with calm resting poses.

Dates: Multiple classes, Nov. 9 to Dec. 16

Location: 1500 Scribner Ave and Virtual options

Cost: $31/$36 for residents, $41/$46 for nonresidents

Yoga (Fireside)

Enjoy a peaceful evening of basic yoga in a cozy clubhouse complete with a fireplace.

Dates: Multiple classes, Nov. 30 to Dec. 14 and Dec. 1 to Dec. 17

Location: Indian Trails Golf Course

Cost: $20 for residents, $30 for nonresidents

Yoga (Gentle)

Discover your inner yogi in a class that builds strength and body awareness. Class will begin with gentle movement and breathing, progressing to standing sequences and finally ending with calm resting poses.

Dates: Thursdays, Nov. 12 to Dec. 17

Location: Virtual

Cost: $31

Yoga (Power)

This energetic class is designed to build strength, flexibility, and balance! Challenging peak posts, breath to movement flows, and mind body connections will encourage students to find their edge. Modifications are always offered and body awareness is always encouraged.

Dates: Tuesdays, Nov. 10 to Dec. 15

Location: Virtual

Cost: $36

Yoga Sculpt

This energetic class is designed to build strength, flexibility, and balance! Challenging peak posts, breath to movement flows, and mind body connections will encourage students to find their edge. Modifications are always offered and body awareness is always encouraged.

Dates: Tuesdays, Nov. 10 to Dec. 15

Location: Virtual

Cost: $36

Zumba

Zumba is a fast, fun, and upbeat dance fitness class that incorporates Latin and international music. Every class feels like a party! All levels welcome.

Dates: Multiple classes; Nov. 9 - Dec. 19

Location: Riverside Studio @ 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $31-36 for residents, $41-46 for nonresidents

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Ballet

Participants will explore the basics of ballet through imaginative play and movement. With an emphasis on coordination, balance, and flexibility, children will develop motor skills while learning simple ballet steps and terminology. Using playful themes and songs, the class encourages creativity and helps children build confidence in a supportive and joyful environment.

Ages: 3-4 and 5-8

Dates: Multiple classes from Nov. 9 to Dec. 14

Location: 1500 Scribner Ave

Cost: $50 for residents, $60 for non-residents

Cheerleading Clinic

This youth cheerleading program is designed to give young women an opportunity to build confidence, develop leadership skills, stay active, and create positive friendships in a fun and supportive environment.

Cheerleading is more than learning cheers and routines. It teaches teamwork, discipline, commitment, communication, coordination, responsibility, and perseverance. Our goal is to create an encouraging space where every young woman can feel confident, learn new skills, challenge herself, and be a part of a team.

Ages: 6-9 and 10-12

Dates: Saturdays, Nov. 7 to Dec. 5

Locations: MLK Park Community Center

Cost: $40 for residents, $50 for non-residents

Futsal: Train & Play

Keep your kids active while continuing to build their skills through our futsal program. Learn from certified coaches from MPFA with extensive soccer experience as they lead age-appropriate drills for the first half of each Saturday session and game play the second half for participants. Participants will be placed into groups (no formal teams).

Ages: 10-12 with divisions for male/female

Dates: Saturdays, Dec. 5 to Jan. 16

Locations: Roosevelt Park Gym

Cost: $50 for residents, $60 for nonresidents

Guitar Lessons with Riverside Guitar School

Is your child curious about the guitar but unsure about lessons or committing to a session? Try a short, no-pressure introduction with four group classes or private lessons at Riverside Guitar School. After you register, Riverside Guitar School will contact you to schedule a time that works for you.

- A parent or guardian must stay with children ages 12 and under during class.
- A guitar will be provided for your child to use during lessons.

This offer may be used only once per person. If you'd like to continue after the four lessons, Riverside Guitar School will be happy to discuss ongoing options with you.

Ages: 4 and up

Dates: Year-round

Cost: $68 for residents, $78 for nonresidents

Tae Kwon Do

Discover the fundamentals of Tae Kwon Do, the dynamic Korean martial art that emphasizes flexibility, concentration, balance, and self-defense. Under the guidance of a skilled instructor, participants will:

- Improve physical fitness and flexibility
- Enhance focus and mental discipline
- Develop balance and coordination
- Learn practical self-defense techniques
- Build confidence and self-respect

This class is perfect for kids, adults of all ages, and even families looking for a fun and empowering activity to do together. Whether you're a beginning or looking to sharpen your skills, Tae Kwon Do offers something for everyone!

Ages: 7 and up

Location: Garfield Park Community Gym

Time: 6 – 7:30 p.m.

Sessions: Tuesdays, May 19 to June 30 (no class June 2 and June 9)

Cost: $30 for residents, $40 for non-residents

Tumbling: Parent & Child Movement

A playful introduction to movement designed for toddlers and their grown-ups! Children will explore tumbling, climbing, balancing, jumping, rolling, and other age-appropriate activities through guided play and simple obstacle courses. Parents or caregivers participate alongside their child, helping build confidence, coordination, body awareness, and early motor skills. Come move, play, and explore together in a fun, encouraging environment!

Ages: 1-3

Dates: Multiple classes, Nov. 9 to Dec. 15

Locations: Garfield Park Community Gym

Cost: $50 for residents, $60 for nonresidents

Tumbling for Dance, Cheer, & Gymnastics

Build your tumbling skills at your own level! This class is designed for ages 10+ and welcomes everyone from first-time tumblers to athletes working on advanced skills. Perfect for dancers, cheerleaders, gymnasts, or anyone who loves to tumble.

Participants will work on strength, flexibility, technique, and skill progressions tailored to their individual ability - from handstands, cartwheels, and round offs to walkovers, handsprings, and advanced tumbling. Coaches will help each athlete progress safely, build confidence, and work toward their personal goals. Beginners welcome!

Ages: 10-17

Dates: Multiple classes, Nov. 9 to Dec. 15

Locations: Garfield Park Community Gym

Cost: $50 for residents, $60 for nonresidents

Youth Ninja & Tumbling

Get moving, build confidence, and learn new skills! This high-energy class combines tumbling, ninja-style movement, and introductory trampoline skills for a fun and engaging movement experience. Participants will work on rolls, cartwheels, handstands, jumps, balance, agility, strength, and coordination while navigating obstacle courses and movement challenges. Skills are taught progressively so beginners can learn the basics while returning participants continue to grow. No previous experience is needed.

Ages: 4-6 and 7-9

Dates: Multiple classes, Nov. 9 to Dec. 15

Locations: Garfield Park Community Gym

Cost: $50 for residents, $60 for nonresidents

Youth Basketball Clinic

This youth basketball clinic will provide introductory basketball education and development to promote physical and mental growth. Emphasis will be on basketball basics including dribbling, layups, footwork, and body development.

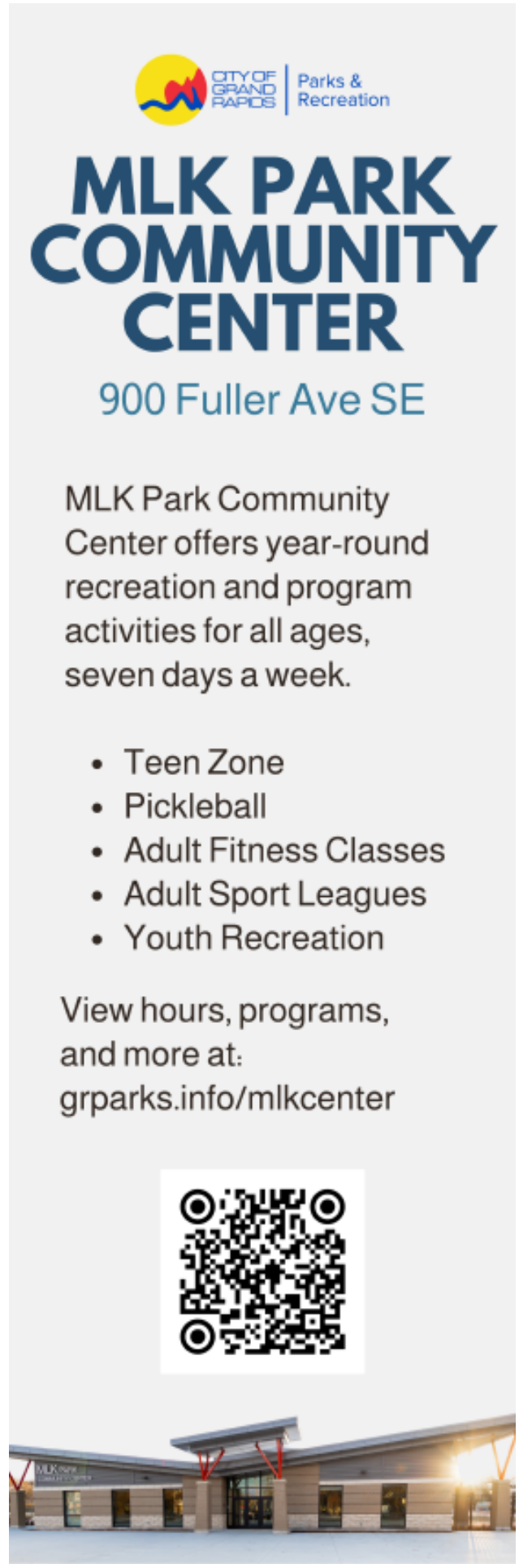
Ages: 5-8

Dates: Sundays, Nov. 8 to Dec. 13

Locations: MLK Park Community Center

Cost: $50 for residents, $60 for nonresidents

For more information on upcoming activities, fitness classes, and recreation events in Grand Rapids, visit grparks.info/home or call 616-456-3696, for more information and follow Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation (@grparksandrec) on social media for updates.



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



Baby & Me
Fridays, October 16, 23, 30, November 6, 13, 20
10:30 am Van Belkum Branch

Bring your baby and bounce along to fun stories, songs, and rhymes. Baby & Me is a 15-minute storytime followed by a relaxed playtime where you and baby will meet new friends. For ages 0–18 months.

Toddler Time
Tuesdays, October 20, 27, November 3, 10, 17
10:30 am West Side Branch

Fridays, October 16, 23, 30, November 6, 13, 20
10:30 am Ottawa Hills Branch

Bring your toddlers to share fun stories, songs, and rhymes, and learn together! Toddler Time is a 25-minute long storytime followed by a hands-on activity and playtime designed to help your child's brain grow. For ages 18 months–3 years.

Family Storytime
Mondays, October 19, 26, November 2, 9, 16, 30
10:30 am Main Library

Wednesdays, October 14, 21, 28, November 4, 11
10:30 am Seymour Branch

Thursdays, October 15, 22, 29, November 5, 12, 19
10:30 am Yankee Clipper Branch

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.

Pajama Time
Mondays, October 19, 26, November 2, 9, 16, 30
6:30 pm West Leonard Branch

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.

Bilingual Family Time
Wednesdays, October 14, November 11
1:00 pm West Side Branch

Join us for a bilingual storytime filled with fun stories, movement, and music activities. The 30-minute English and Spanish storytime is followed by a hands-on activity and playtime. For families with children ages 0–5 years.

Dinovember Dance Party & Storytime
Wednesday, November 4
6:30 pm Ottawa Hills Branch

Monday, November 9
6:30 pm Seymour Branch

Saturday, November 14
10:30 am Van Belkum Branch

Tuesday, November 17
6:30 pm Yankee Clipper Branch

Saturday, November 21
10:30 am Main Library

Monday, November 23
6:30 pm West Leonard Branch

Dinovember is a fun-filled month dedicated to dinosaurs. Enjoy dinosaur-themed stories, songs, and crafts. For ages 0–11 years.

Early Literacy Tip | Singing

Singing is a fun and interactive way to help your child build important pathways in their brain that support the development of early literacy skills, specifically their phonological awareness. Now what is phonological awareness? Well, in the simplest of definitions, it is the ability to recognize separate sounds in words and manipulate those sounds to make other words.

How do songs help your child develop this skill? In most songs, there are different musical notes for each syllable of the word being sung. This naturally slows down how the words are coming at your child's ears, and this slow, rhythmic fashion (or singing) makes it so much easier for your child to hear all of the sounds in the words being sung! Take a moment to think about your favorite children's song and sing it slowly in your head (or out loud) to see if you can pick up on all of the different sounds that make up each word.

Now you don't have to be an amazing singer to sing to and with your child. And honestly, if you aren't the greatest singer but still give it a try and be silly with it, your child may feel more comfortable singing along too! You are their first teachers and role models; whatever they see you doing, they will want to do too.

At the end of the day, it doesn't matter how well you can sing; your little one will enjoy singing, dancing, and laughing together. Consider this your official permission to sing off-key. As long as your little one is engaged and joining in the fun, those early literacy skills will follow.

Helpful tips for singing with your child:

– Clap along to a song to help distinguish the sounds/syllables

– Read a book with your child that you can sing along with

– Add movement to the song by swaying, bouncing, jumping, or whatever feels right

– Make up your own verses to familiar favorites like "The Wheels on the Bus" or "Old MacDonald Had a Farm"

– Incorporate singing into your daily routine: sing in the car when stopped at a red light, sing during bath time or clean up time

Events for Everyone

FOR KIDS



Tails & Tales | Read to Therapy Dogs

Wednesdays, October 14, November 11
6:00 – 7:00 pm Van Belkum Branch

Wednesday, October 28
6:00 – 7:00 pm Ottawa Hills Branch

Kids are invited to practice reading to a licensed therapy dog from West Michigan Therapy Dogs Ruff Readers! Attendees will be able to read to a therapy dog for 10–15 minutes. While kids wait for their chance to read, the library will provide a small craft or activity. Reading spots with dogs are available on a first-come, first-served basis. For ages 6 –13.

Adventurer Club: Role-Playing Games for Kids

Tuesday, November 10
4:30 – 6:00 pm Yankee Clipper

Is your child interested in tabletop roleplaying games, but still a bit young for Dungeons & Dragons? Library staff will lead kids (and their grown-ups too, if they want!) in some fun, easy-to-learn games. No experience or supplies necessary! For ages 8–11.



Stuffed Animal Sleepover

Thursday, November 12
6:00 – 7:00 pm Madison Square Branch

Bring your stuffed animal for a night of fun at the library! Join us for an evening bedtime story and craft activity before dropping off your animal friends for a sleepover. Pick up your animals the next morning, along with some goodies from the library. For ages 6–11.

FOR TEENS

Open Art Lab for Teens

Tuesday, October 20
4:00 – 5:30 pm Van Belkum Branch

Through fun, low-pressure creative activities, teens will explore different ways to make art—no artistic experience required. Whether you're a doodler, a painter, or someone who thinks they can't draw at all, you'll discover that anyone can be creative. For ages 12–18.

Teen Anime Club

Thursdays, October 29, November 19
4:00 – 6:00 pm West Side Branch

Join Teen Anime Club to chat with other enthusiasts about your favorite anime and manga! Chat about what you're currently reading and watch anime episodes together! Snacks are provided and attendees can enter a drawing to win a prize. For teens ages 13–19.

FOR ALL AGES



Music in the Stacks | Normal Mode

Thursday, October 15
6:00 – 7:00 pm West Side Branch

Enjoy local music at the Grand Rapids Public Library! Featuring emerging and established talent, Music in the Stacks is a fun and lively event designed for all ages.

Grand Rapids quartet Normal Mode crafts a distinctive "lo-fi space travel music" that blends jazz, electronic, rock, and funk with deep improvisation. The band has shared stages with Joe Hertler, performed at festivals like Earthworks, and held creative residencies at Midtown. Known for cosmic live experiences—including a performance at the Chaffee Planetarium—their debut album *Downlink* earned WYCE Jammie nominations for Best Jazz Album and Song of the Year.

Promotional support for GRPL's musical events is provided in part by 88.1 FM WYCE.



Friends of the Library Book Sale

Saturday, October 17
9:00 am – 4:00 pm Main Library
All books are 50 cents each.

Sunday, October 18
1:00 – 4:00 pm Main Library
Fill a grocery bag for $5.00. Bring your own bag.

Join us at one of the library's biggest book sales of the year! During this popular fundraiser, find bargains to help fill your home bookshelf, office, or classroom. Materials are added throughout the day. Cash, Venmo, and credit cards are accepted at this event.

This event is presented by the Friends of the Grand Rapids Public Library. All proceeds benefit the Grand Rapids Public Library.

FOR ADULTS

Conversation Circle | English

Wednesdays, October 14, 21, 28, November 4, 11, December 2
7:00 – 8:00 pm Main Library

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.

Conversation Circle | Spanish

Saturdays, November 14, December 12
2:00 – 3:00 pm Main Library

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

Food Safety at Home 101

Saturday, October 24
1:00 – 2:00 pm Main Library

Saturday, November 14
1:00 – 2:00 pm Seymour Branch

Kent County Health Department's Food Safety team will share steps people can take while handling food at home to protect themselves and their loved ones from food-borne illnesses. Free food safety kits will be provided to participants that include probe thermometers, cutting boards, gloves, and other food safety supplies. For adults.

Beadwork Workshop for Adults

Monday, November 16
6:00 – 7:00 pm Main Library

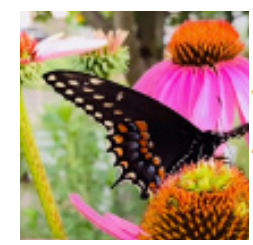
Join us for a hands-on beadwork workshop led by Bead & Powwow Supply, a small Indigenous-owned business dedicated to uplifting Indigenous arts, crafts, and fashion. Founded in 2011 by artist A. Ellie Mitchell (Saginaw Ojibwe, Eagle Clan), Bead & Powwow Supply brings cultural knowledge and creative inspiration to every event. For adults.

Special thanks to the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation and the Wege Foundation for their support of this program.

Hygge Night with Silent Book Club

Monday, November 16
6:00 – 7:00 pm Yankee Clipper

Join us and Silent Book Club GR for a cozy evening inspired by the Danish concept of hygge—all about enjoying simple pleasures in a warm, welcoming atmosphere.



Plants & Pollinators with Wild Ones River City

Monday, November 16
6:30 – 8:00 pm Main Library

Learn how native plants and pollinators work together to support healthy ecosystems, promote biodiversity, and sustain local wildlife. Presented by Wild Ones River City.

Computer Classes & Technology Support

Google Drive Basics: Google Docs
Monday, October 19
11:30 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

Cloud storage services like Google Drive allow you to store and edit documents online. These documents can be accessed or edited on any device with an Internet connection. In this class, we will discuss how to create, edit, and share word processing files.

Google Drive Basics: Google Sheets
Monday, October 26
11:30 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

Cloud storage services like Google Drive allow you to store and edit documents online. These documents can be accessed or edited on any device with an Internet connection. In this class, we will learn how to create, edit, and share spreadsheets.

Building Basic Computer Skills
Monday, November 2
11:30 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

In this class, you will gain skills to help you start navigating the Internet, mobile devices, and many types of software. Learn basic terminology used in technology to build a foundation for digital literacy.

Discovering the Internet
Monday, November 9
11:30 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

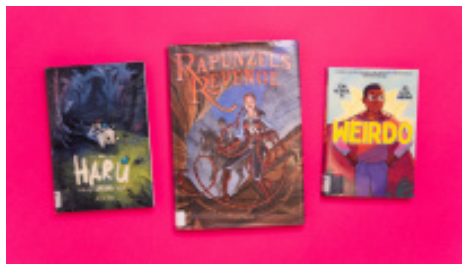
In this class, you will learn how the Internet works and basic definitions for the most common Internet terms. Discover tips and tricks on how to protect your information and identity while searching, shopping, and browsing the web.

Exploring Email
Monday, November 16
11:30 am – 1:00 pm Main Library

In this class, you will explore how to secure your email account and regain access if you forget your password. You will also discover how to use two-factor authentication to protect your accounts.

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

Book Clubs for Kids and Adults



After School Book Club
Tuesday, November 3
4:00 – 5:00 pm Seymour Branch

4th through 6th graders are invited to this after school event! We will read the same book, chat about it together, and swap recommendations for other books we love.

Snacks are provided. For ages 9–12.Novem-

ber: *Haru* by Joe Latham



Social Justice Begins With ME
Saturdays, November 14, December 12
10:30 am – 12:00 pm Main Library
Registration encouraged:
www.grpl.org/sjbookclub

Each month, the Social Justice Begins with ME book club examines a different social justice topic. All participants will enjoy a snack and themed craft activity. Children ages 4–8 listen to a book read by a volunteer and discuss the month's social justice topics in small groups. Children ages 9–11 will read a book in advance and discuss the book as a group.

November's topic: Immigrant Rights
December's topic: Gender Equity

This program is a partnership between the Grand Rapids Public Library and the School of Social Work at Grand Valley State University.

Mystery Book Club
Wednesday, November 4
6:00 – 7:00 pm Van Belkum Branch

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

Book selection: *Where They Last Saw Her* by Marcie R. Rendon

Sci-Fi Book Club
Wednesday, November 4
6:00 – 7:00 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.

Book selection: *Walking Practice* by Dolki Min

Popular Pages Book Club
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. These book clubs are designed for adults.

Popular Pages at West Leonard
Tuesday, November 10
6:00 – 7:00 pm West Leonard Branch

Book selection: *Born of Lakes and Plains: Mixed-Descent Peoples and the Making of the American West* by Anne F. Hyde

Popular Pages at Seymour
Saturday, November 14
12:00 – 1:00 pm Seymour Branch

Book selection: *The Gales of November* by John U. Bacon

Popular Pages at Yankee Clipper
Monday, November 16
6:00 – 7:00 pm Yankee Clipper Branch

Book selection: *Warrior Girl Unearthed* by Angeline Boulley

Designing Our Next Chapter



The Grand Rapids Public Library is partnering with global design experts, includi, to reimagine select interior spaces within the Main Library.

By investing in the design of these heavily used areas, we will create a high-quality library experience that will evolve alongside our vision for the future. Because we want our plans to directly reflect your needs and interests, we are inviting the public to collaborate with us along the way to build the kind of public space our community needs and deserves.

Together, we'll create a renewed library where everyone feels welcome, whether they come to borrow books, study, attend an event, or simply relax with a newspaper—



alone or with others.

Project Goals

This project reimagines our teen and children's section, lobby and adjacent rooms, and lower-level common areas to better serve as a third place for our residents.

By redesigning these areas, we can better function as a community hub—providing a vibrant and welcoming destination for everyone in our community.



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About our Interior Design Partner

includi is a design firm that specializes in creating third places—inclusive social spaces such as libraries and community centers that foster connection and belonging while helping reduce social isolation. By combining local research, community input, and decades of design experience, includi transforms public infrastructure into welcoming places where people are invited to come, inspired to stay, and empowered to grow.

View past project examples by visiting



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www.includi.com/projects

"At includi, we specialize in creating successful public places, including libraries. We see libraries as true third places. They keep their doors wide open, inviting people to come. They offer the comfort and atmosphere that make people want to stay. And beyond that, they create opportunities for people to grow. A library's appearance matters, but what it enables matters even more. We're honored and excited to support Grand Rapids Public Library in realizing its vision of becoming a community hub."

– Aat Vos, Creative Director at includi

Project Phases

Phase 1: Design & Feasibility

Working with experts to develop visual concepts, space-use plans, and budget projections.

Phase 2: Fundraising

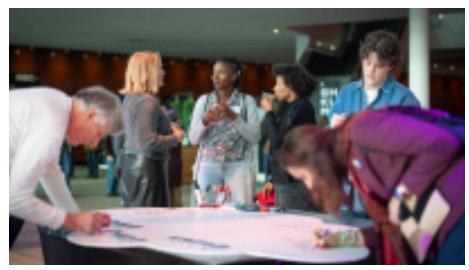
The Grand Rapids Public Library will hire an external vendor to partner with our Executive Director on a campaign to secure new grants and donations.

Phase 3: Redesign Planning

Detailed logistical planning for the physical transformation.

Phase 4: Redesign

The physical upgrades and realization of the new designs.



Get Involved

To ensure that our visual concepts and space-use plans reflect the community's needs and interests, we are inviting the public into this collaborative process. Look out for upcoming events and surveys designed to get your feedback.

Main Library Interior Redesign: Public Input Sessions with includi

Thursday, November 5
6:00 – 8:00 pm Main Library

Saturday, November 7
10:00 am – 12:00 pm Main Library

Space is limited. Seating is first come, first served.

Can't attend the event? Drop by the Main Library to provide input on available feedback boards. This activity is available during open hours and until November 15, 2026.

Donate

Support this project by giving safely and securely online to the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation (www.grplfoundation.org) or mail your gift to the following address, make checks payable to:

Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation (GRPLF)
111 Library Street NE
Grand Rapids MI 49503

When making a donation to this project, please indicate that your gift is intended for our Main Library Redesign. Gifts in any amount will ensure our flagship location remains a source of connection and community pride for the next generation.

Board of Library Commissioners

Rachel S. Anderson

Kelly Boston

Justine Bryant

Kathryn Dilley

Bryan Holt

Kevin Peterson

Lauren Woolsey

Library Director

John J. McNaughton

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY