



CITY OF  
GRAND  
RAPIDS

# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

The City of Grand Rapids Design & Development Department has a stated mission of facilitating positive change. It exists to guide public and private development efforts and administer related City ordinances fairly. The mission of staff includes respecting the overall views and interests of the community and people who are impacted by specific projects or changes.

City of Grand Rapids  
Design & Development  
Department

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## Introduction

The City of Grand Rapids Design & Development Department has created this Public Participation Strategy for community planning and development project review that summarizes the City's policies and procedures related to public participation and engagement, including:

- Public Participation Goals
- Key Stakeholders in the Community Planning and Development Review Processes
- Applicable State and Local Regulations
- Opportunities for Public Participation
- Strategies for Public Participation in Community Planning
- Strategies for Public Participation in Development Review
- Public Participation Methods

The City of Grand Rapids is required by State law, the City Code, the City Zoning Ordinance and the bylaws of the various boards and commissions to pursue public participation in the community planning and development review processes. The City follows public engagement processes that provide timely public notice, and that encourage early and continuing involvement of stakeholders. The Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and Historic Preservation Commission hold public meetings at the Development Center (1120 Monroe Ave. NW). The City Commission and holds most public meetings at City Hall (300 Monroe Ave. NW). Periodically, the City Commission will meet in other locations in the community, such as a school or church. All meeting facilities are barrier free and accessible to the general public. Information is made available on the City website, online meeting portal, and Facebook pages. The City employs various methods to reach larger audiences when needed and implements additional measures to engage the community and a diverse set of stakeholders in the community planning and development review processes.

## 1. Public Participation Goals

The Design & Development Department has adopted the following Public Participation Goals:

- Conduct all aspects of public participation in an open manner, accessible to all interested persons.
- Solicit public participation in each phase of the planning process for Master Plan updates, specialized plans (e.g., Green Grand Rapids), and Area Specific Plans.
- Engage a diverse set of community stakeholders in community planning, land use decision-making, and development review processes.
- Encourage the involvement of residents most affected by the proposed plan, land use decision, or development project.
- Identify and involve a broad and representative cross-section of the community's residents.
- Make reasonable efforts to ensure continuity of involvement of citizens throughout all stages of community planning and development review.
- Utilize effective and equitable avenues for distributing information and receiving comments that include the City website, online meeting portal, and Facebook pages.
- Support and encourage effective participation by making information available in a timely manner, so as to enable citizens to be involved in important decisions at various stages of the review and approval process.
- Record the results of public engagement to the extent feasible and provide summaries back to the public.

- Continually improve public participation methods through shared learning, adoption of best practices, innovation, and evaluation of existing methods and processes.

These Public Participation Goals are aligned with various State statutes, including the Open Meetings Act and the Planning Enabling Act, as well as City policy and community expectations for service delivery. In some situations, public participation options are constrained by State statutes and case law related to property rights, legal standing, etc.

## 2. Key Stakeholders

The following stakeholders represents a diverse set of individuals, groups and organizations that are interested in, or affected by, the community planning and development review processes. Different groups may be engaged in each process depending on the nature of the project, the plan, level of interest and the City’s financial involvement in the project.

- Business Associations
- Business Owners
- City Boards & Commissions
- City Commission
- Civic/Social Organizations
- Corridor Improvement District Boards
- Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc.
- Economic Development Partners
- Environmental Groups
- Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce
- Grand Rapids Community College
- Grand Rapids Public Library
- Grand Rapids Public Schools
- Kent County
- Kent Intermediate School District
- Local First, Affiliated Businesses
- Major Local Employers
- Neighborhood Associations
- Neighboring Municipalities
- Investors/ Developers
- Professional Associations & Networking Groups
- Public Employees
- Real Estate Agents & Brokers
- Residents
- Senior Citizens
- Senior Groups
- Steering/Ad Hoc Committees
- Students and Student Groups
- Taxing Jurisdictions
- The Right Place
- Urban Core Collective, Affiliated Organization
- Utility Service Providers
- Other Stakeholders

## 3. State and Local Regulations

The Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, Historic Preservation Commission, and Design & Development Department follow the local and state regulations listed below, which are applicable to the planning and development review processes. These regulations include provisions for public review and participation in community planning processes, and provisions for public hearings in development review processes.

- Home Rule City Act (PA 279 of 1909)
- Grand Rapids City Charter
- Grand Rapids Code of Ordinances
- Grand Rapids Zoning Ordinance
- The Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976)
- The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008)
- The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006)

Other regulations apply to financial and tax-related aspects of development:

- Brownfield Redevelopment Financing Act (PA 381 of 1996)
- Downtown Development Authority Act (PA 197 of 1975)
- Local Historic Districts Act (PA169 of 1970)
- The Plant Rehabilitation and Industrial Development Districts Act (known as the Industrial Facilities Exemption) (PA 198 of 1974)
- The New Personal Property Exemption Act (PA 328 of 1998)
- Other relevant state and local legislation

### 3.1 Michigan Open Meetings Act

The Design & Development Department holds Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and Historic Preservation Commission meetings in accordance with the Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976). Pursuant to the Open Meetings Act:

- The public will be notified of the annual meeting schedule of a board or commission within 10 days of its first meeting in each calendar year. A list stating the dates, times, and places of all its regular meetings will be posted on the City's website and at City Hall.
- If there is a change in meeting schedule, within three days of the meeting in which the change is made, an updated notice including the new dates, times and places of regular meetings will be posted on the City's website and at City Hall.
- For a special meeting, a notice indicating the date, time and place will be posted on the City's website and at City Hall at least 18 hours before the meeting.

### 3.2 Michigan Planning Enabling Act

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008) is the enabling statute for creation of a planning commission, and local government adoption of plans, master plans, etc. The act includes:

- Authorization for a local government to establish a Master Plan meeting specified criteria.
- Planning Commission membership, authority, and requirements.
- Master Plan process, including plan initiation, preparation, distribution, comment period, Planning Commission approval, and approval or rejection by the local legislative body (City Commission, in Grand Rapids).

### 3.3 Michigan Zoning Enabling Act

The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006) is the enabling statute for creation of a zoning ordinance. The act includes:

- Public hearing notification requirements, whereby the general public and neighboring property owners are notified in advance of zoning-related public hearings.
- Authorization for a local government to regulate land development by establishing zone districts and related regulations.
- Requirement that each legal use must be allowed in at least one district.

- State-wide regulations for certain types of uses.
- Planning Commission membership, authority, and requirements.
- Board of Zoning Appeals membership, authority, and requirements.
- Procedures and requirements related to site plan review, special land use review, planned development review, and zoning appeals.
- Other zoning-related requirements and provisions.

## 4. Public Participation in Community Planning

Community planning processes include plan initiation, public engagement, plan preparation, plan distribution, legally required comment period, Planning Commission approval, and City Commission approval for:

- Master Plan updates
- Specialized plans (e.g., Green Grand Rapids)
- Area Specific Plans (ASPs)

In the following sub-sections, strategies for public participation in community planning processes are grouped by their level of impact along the “spectrum of public participation” defined by the International Association for Public Participation ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).

### 4.1 Informative Methods

The goal of these informative public participation methods is to provide balanced and objective information in a timely manner ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).

#### *Website Resources*

The City’s website has been redesigned, making content much easier to find and interact with on any type of device. Additional content is created and published regularly. The Planning webpage includes “featured updates” and an “our projects” section with links to multiple active community planning processes. The “Master Plan” online guide includes links to each chapter of the plan, along with links to the many specialized plans and Area Specific Plans that have been adopted during the past decade. The “Zoning Ordinance” page includes a helpful resource on “how to use the Zoning Ordinance.”

Links: [www.grandrapidsmi.gov/planning](http://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/planning); <https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Directory/Programs-and-Initiatives/Master-Plan>; <https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Directory/Programs-and-Initiatives/Zoning-Ordinance>

#### *Social & Traditional Media*

The City maintains Facebook social media pages to communicate general information, topics of interest, project updates, and other items. Traditional media contact generally occurs through the City’s Communications Director. Both social media and traditional formats are generally utilized for informative purposes only and not as tools for collecting public input. They can however be used to promote upcoming community planning events.

Links: [www.facebook.com/grdevelopmentcenter](http://www.facebook.com/grdevelopmentcenter), [www.facebook.com/CityofGrandRapids](http://www.facebook.com/CityofGrandRapids)

### *Mailings*

Mailings are used to inform geographically defined audiences about community planning processes. A letter-style mailing may be used to notify residents and businesses of the start of a significant initiative. Postcards may be used to send notifications/reminders of specific meetings or events. While the City does not have location-based e-mail address directory, it does have a comprehensive property ownership and mailing address database that, in combination with the City's Geographic Information System (GIS), can produce mailing lists for the owners and/or occupants of a custom geographic area.

### *E-Mail Updates*

E-mail updates are used to inform people and organizations that have subscribed to specific topic-driven mailing lists, including for community planning processes. Mail Chimp is the tool of choice for maintaining distribution lists and sending bulk e-mail communications. E-mail is typically used for follow-up, as opposed to initial communication, since the City does not have a location-based e-mail address directory. E-mail is most effective when used to communicate with individuals already known to be interested in a planning process or initiative.

### *Staff Presentations*

Planning staff maintain more than 150 stock presentations to use in a variety of settings, such as the annual neighborhood summit hosted by the City each spring, as well as neighborhood meetings, conferences, various professional meetings, college and high school classes, and other events.

## 4.2 Consultative Methods

The goal of this consultative method is to obtain feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives, and decisions ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).

### *Surveys*

Surveys are occasionally used to gather topic-specific input, generally as part of a larger planning project. An example would be use of a visual preference survey related to design elements of a park or streetscape plan. Survey Monkey is the tool of choice for surveying the public, and survey requests may be sent to the same e-mail distribution lists noted under "E-mail Updates" in the section above.

## 4.3 Involving Methods

The goal of these involving methods is to work with the public to make sure that concerns and aspirations are considered and understood ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).

### *Community / Public Meetings*

Community / public meetings are generally topic-driven events versus development project-driven. A community meeting may occasionally be a stand-alone event, but is generally held as part of a comprehensive planning and engagement process, for example as a part of an Area Specific Plan process. The geographical focus may also vary, from location specific events (such as neighborhood or regional) to topics of city-wide interest. These meetings can range from sessions that are more informative to full participatory events depending on the structure and activities involved. For example, meetings may include visioning exercises, break-out discussions, preference surveys, and other ways in which participants can both learn and provide feedback and direction.

### *Focus Groups / Steering Committees*

Focus groups and steering committees are collective meetings of stakeholders generally utilized as a part of the Area Specific Plan process, although they can be formed for other specific community planning tasks. Participants may include residents, business owners, property owners, workers, institutions, elected officials, city officials, neighborhood and business association representatives, non-profit organizations, and other groups or individuals who are interested in the area or topic of consideration. These participants should remain engaged throughout the planning process to ensure ownership of the resulting plan recommendations, to assist with implementation, and ultimately, to realize the goals of the planning effort.

### *Gamification*

The City has successfully used custom developed board games focused on specific community planning efforts to obtain resident feedback in a fun and engaging format. This approach was employed in the Green Grand Rapids, Michigan Street Corridor, and Age Friendly Communities planning processes. The “Quality of Life Game” developed for the Michigan Street Corridor process was modeled on the longstanding children’s game “Life.” The Quality of Life game had participants move their game pieces through the corridor/game board, identifying and selecting quality-of-life items they would like to see in each section (such as bus stops, grocery stores, parks, housing, etc.). The game also tried to capture user experience along the corridor with a series of questions and the creation of “alter egos” that placed a player in another person’s shoes. The games were placed in public locations throughout the corridor, including coffee shops, libraries, and other public gathering spaces. Twenty-six board games were returned and 130 individuals participated.

Link: <http://www.therapidian.org/quality-life-board-game> for a user-experience narrative of the game.

### *4.3.1 Master Planning Process*

The Master Planning process emphasizes a high level of public involvement to make sure that community concerns and aspirations are considered and understood. Full Master Plan updates are multi-year efforts that require a significant financial investment supported by the City and community partners. Full updates are undertaken approximately once every 10-20 years. Specialized plans and Area Specific Plans are created or updated more frequently and are considered to be incorporated into the Master Plan, but are not full updates.

The City of Grand Rapids is required to follow, at a minimum, the provisions of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008) for Master Plan updates, specialized plans, and Area Specific Plans.

At the start of the process, the Planning Commission must send a notice to stakeholders as listed in the State enabling legislation; the notice explains that the Planning Commission intends to prepare a plan and requests cooperation and up-front comment on the plan, as well as comment on the future proposed plan.

The Planning Commission and City staff then begin work on drafting the plan update. They involve the public by way of the methods listed in the “Public Participation in Community Planning” sections of this document including, but not limited to, steering committees, open houses, community meetings, community walks and tours, website updates, social media, and surveys. The City will encourage the involvement and participation of all stakeholders, including any marginalized groups that may be typically less involved in the planning process. Stakeholder involvement is encouraged from the beginning and the



results of such public participation will be made available to the community and participants, and incorporated as much as is reasonably possible in the draft plan update.

In preparation, studies of existing conditions and probable growth will be conducted as the basis of the plan update. The Planning Commission may make use of expert advice and information from federal, State, County, and municipal officials, departments, and agencies having information, maps, and data pertinent to the City. The City may consult with representatives of adjacent local units of government with respect to their plans so that conflicts in master plans and zoning may be avoided.

The City may cooperate with all departments of the State and federal governments, public transportation agencies, and other public agencies concerned with programs for economic, social, and physical development within the City and seek the maximum coordination of the local unit of government's programs with these agencies.

The City will encourage and track public participation through a variety of means, including minutes, audio recordings of meetings, comment cards, sign-in sheets, and input received verbally, through written correspondence and other means as appropriate.

The Planning Commission will submit the proposed Master Plan update to the City Commission for review and comment. The process of adopting the plan update will not proceed further unless the City Commission approves the distribution of the proposed plan.

The City Commission will act on the proposed Master Plan update during a public meeting held in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. The City Commission will decide whether to approve the distribution of the proposed plan to local governments and agencies for review and comment.

If the City Commission approves the distribution of the proposed Master Plan update, it will notify the secretary of the Planning Commission, and the secretary of the Planning Commission will submit, in the manner provided by the State Planning Enabling Act a copy of the proposed plan, for review and comment, to all of the units listed in the Enabling Act. These entities may submit comments on the proposed plan to the Planning Commission within 63 days after the proposed plan was submitted to that entity.

Before approving the proposed Master Plan update, the Planning Commission will hold at least one public hearing on the proposed plan. The hearing will be held after the expiration of the deadline for comment. The Planning Commission will give notice of the time and place of the public hearing not less than 15 days before the hearing by publication in a newspaper of general circulation within the City of Grand Rapids. The Planning Commission also will submit notice of the public hearing to the entities that received initial communication.

The proposed Master Plan update shall be approved by resolution of the Planning Commission carried by the affirmative votes of not less than 2/3 of the members. A statement recording the Planning Commission's approval of the plan, signed by the chairperson or secretary of the Planning Commission, shall be included on the inside of the front or back cover of the Master Plan. Following approval of the proposed Master Plan, the Secretary of the Planning Commission shall submit a copy of the plan to the City Commission.

Approval of the proposed Master Plan update by the Planning Commission is the final step for adoption of the plan, unless the City Commission by resolution has asserted the right to approve or reject the plan.

In that case, after approval of the proposed plan by the Planning Commission, the City Commission shall approve or reject the proposed plan. A statement recording the City Commission's approval of the Master Plan, signed by the City Clerk, shall be included on the inside of the front or back cover of the Master Plan if the City Commission takes action on the Plan.

#### 4.3.2 Zoning Ordinance Amendment Process

The Planning Department has made it a practice to host community discussion workshops when text amendments to the Zoning Ordinance are proposed, and recently, when potential amendments are being considered on a purely conceptual basis, well before any actual amendment language has even been drafted. Such meetings have been held as recently as October 23, 2017, with a second meeting to be held on November 2, for several ideas of text amendments that may be proposed which would affect the regulation of housing types in the City.

A similar meeting was hosted in late 2016 to discuss several major amendments to the Zoning Ordinance in response to recent planning processes, such as the "GR Forward" downtown and river plan that had been led by Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc., as well as from nationwide decisions such as the Supreme Court's decisions regarding local governance of signs.

The Planning Commission may of its own motion, or shall upon petition for a zoning amendment, consider an ordinance amending or changing the district boundaries or district regulations. In most cases, applications are due 25 days before the next meeting of the Planning Commission in order to meet the public hearing notice requirements. Notice of the proposed ordinance will be published in a newspaper of general distribution in the City at least 15 days prior to the hearing.

Prior to submitting its recommendation to the City Commission, the Planning Commission will hold a public hearing. The City Commission will, on receipt of the report of the Planning Commission, set a date for a public hearing, as well as a subsequent date for consideration of the proposed amendment, supplement, or change. On the date scheduled for consideration, the City Commission may act upon the adoption thereof, with or without amendment.

Following adoption of the ordinance to amend, supplement or change the district boundaries or the district regulations, the ordinance will be filed with the City Clerk, and a notice of the ordinance adoption will be published in a newspaper of general circulation in Grand Rapids within 15 days after adoption. The ordinance will take effect 30 days after adoption unless given immediate effect by separate motion of the City Commission.

#### 4.4 Collaborative Methods

The goal of this collaborative method is to partner with the public in each aspect of the decision-making ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).

##### *Area Specific Plan Process*

Area Specific Plans were identified in the 2002 Master Plan as a tool to manage land use change and take a more detailed approach to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to character, design, and detailed issues. Area Specific Planning provides the opportunity to more closely examine a particular geographic area of the city and tailor appropriate recommendations that best suit the needs of area residents, businesses, and property owners. An Area Specific Plan can be initiated by the Planning Commission, property owners, developers, community-based organizations and/or the Planning

Department. The planning process generally takes place over several months (or longer) and includes a variety of active public participation and stakeholder involvement methods. The Area Specific Plan adoption process includes preliminary public hearings, a review and comment period, and final adoption hearings. The Area Specific Plan, when adopted, becomes an amendment to the City Master Plan. The Area Specific Plan process is guided by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act.

Link: <https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Directory/Programs-and-Initiatives/Master-Plan>

## 5. Public Participation in Development Review

For purposes of this strategy, “development review” is the process whereby the Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and/or Historic Preservation Commission consider a proposed development project. The development review process includes:

- Neighborhood meeting(s) – for project types specified in [Design & Development Departmental Policy DD-0001](#)
- General notice of public hearing
- Mailed notice of public hearing to neighboring property owners (within 350 feet)
- Public hearing
- Board and/or Commission decision
- Other voluntary steps, such as a neighborhood design charrette, may be undertaken at the developer’s option.

In the following sub-sections, strategies for public participation in the development review process are grouped by their level of impact along the “spectrum of public participation” defined by the International Association for Public Participation ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).

### 5.1 Informative Methods

The goal of these informative methods is to provide balanced and objective information in a timely manner ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).

#### *Website Resources / Web Portal*

The City’s website has been redesigned, making content much easier to find and interact with on any type of device. Additional content is created and published regularly. The online meeting portal is a specific tool on the Planning Department’s page that provides access to all public hearing agendas and agenda packet materials for the Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and Historic Preservation Commission. Meeting minutes are posted following after public hearings.

Link: [www.grandrapidsmi.gov/planning](http://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/planning).

The City maintains an online guide to its various development review processes, and an associated online questionnaire to help developers and other stakeholders identify which processes apply based upon the unique attributes of a proposed project.

Links: <https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Government/Departments/Development-Center/Development-Project-Screening>, <https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Directory/Guides/Development-Process-Flow-Charts>

### *Newspaper Publication*

Development applications subject to public hearing are advertised by a public notice in a newspaper of general circulation within the City of Grand Rapids. The notice must be published at least 15 days prior to the date of the public hearing. The notice must include a description of the request, the location of the request by street address (if available, or other means if not), and state when and where the request shall be considered. It must also indicate when and where written comments can be addressed regarding the request.

### *Post Card Notice*

A notice to the owners and occupants of properties within 300 feet of a proposed development site is mailed 15 days prior to a public hearing on the project. (It should be noted that a public hearing is not required for most projects.) Staff mails postcard notices to the owners and occupants of properties within a 350-foot radius, exceeding the minimum standard. The notice includes a description of the request, the location of the request by street address (if available, or other means if not), and states when and where the request will be considered. It also indicates when and where written comments may be addressed regarding the request. Notification applies only to the initial hearing regarding the proposed development, unless expressly requested by the reviewing Board or Planning Director.

### *Social & Traditional Media*

The City of Grand Rapids maintains social media Facebook pages to communicate general information, announce public hearings, provide project-specific information, and promote topics of interest related to the City. Traditional media contact generally occurs through the City's Communications Director. Both formats are generally communicative only and not utilized as tools for collecting public input. They can however be used to promote upcoming public hearings and other events.

Links: [www.facebook.com/grdevelopmentcenter](http://www.facebook.com/grdevelopmentcenter), [www.facebook.com/CityofGrandRapids](http://www.facebook.com/CityofGrandRapids)

### *Notice of Filing*

The Notice of Filing notification system is a component of BuildingEye, a map-based application visualization and search tool for building and planning projects within the City. The map is searchable by address or through zoom tools. Each project entry includes the address, application information, application date and status, as well as a link to more detailed information in the Citizen Access application portal. In order to receive notices, the user must create an account and elect to receive notifications. The user may configure alerts for geographic areas of interest, including City neighborhoods, neighborhood associations, business associations, corridor improvement districts, wards, and other standard geographies. Alerts may be filtered by application/case type to minimize the frequency of alerts and also to limit results to large projects and/or board and commission applications.

Link: <https://grandrapids.buildingeye.com/planning>

## 5.2 Consultative Methods

The goal of these consultative methods is to obtain feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives, and decisions ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).

### *Public Hearing*

Public Hearings are the formal process under which a recommendation or decision is made regarding a development application, incentive, or other proposal. Public hearings can take place in front of the

Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, Historic Preservation Commission, or City Commission, with the decision-making capacity of each determined by Michigan Zoning Enabling Act as well as adopted procedures and standards under the Grand Rapids Zoning Ordinance. Public testimony can be provided at the public hearing for the body to consider in their decision-making. Notice of the public hearing is provided to property owners within 350 feet (see “Post Card Notice,” above) and is advertised in the newspaper (see “Newspaper Publication,” above).

The Planning Commission’s meetings are recorded and available for replay on Facebook Live, as are the City Commission’s Committee of the Whole and regular session (evening) meetings. Individual boards and commissions hold public meetings pursuant to their bylaws and State regulations. Meeting agendas and packets of the City Commission, Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and Historic Preservation Commission are made available on the City’s website in advance of the meeting.

Meeting agendas are sent, by mail or e-mail, to all land use applicants. E-mailed alerts are sent to residents and stakeholders who sign up for alerts through the online meeting portal. Meeting minutes of the City Commission and the City’s boards and commissions are coordinated by the staff liaison and posted on the City’s website.

### 5.2.1 Development Review Bodies

#### *City Commission*

The City Commission is the governing body for the City of Grand Rapids. The City Commission consists of six Commissioners and the Mayor, who serve four-year terms. Commissioners are nominated and elected by ward, and their terms are staggered (not all elected at the same time). The Mayor is nominated and elected at large (City-wide). Elections are nonpartisan.

The City Commission, collectively, is the legislative and administrative oversight authority for the city. It is responsible for hiring and overseeing the City Manager, City Clerk, City Attorney, and City Treasurer; and also sets policy and adopts ordinances and resolutions. One of the most important policies is the fiscal plan (budget) which is carried out through reviewing and adopting the annual budget which funds the city’s operations, capital projects and the Commission’s priorities for the fiscal year which begins every July.

#### *Boards and Commissions*

The City encourages citizen participation in local government planning and policy decisions. Therefore, citizens are invited to apply for appointments to City boards and commissions. Some boards and commissions are state-mandated and others are a local creation; however, they all make significant contributions to the community and its betterment. Some groups provide recommendations to the City Commission on various topics and issues.

Some of the boards and commissions review proposed plans and development projects. These boards and commissions function in two capacities, the first being the public policy process, the second being advisory and administrative. These boards or commissions may make recommendations to the City Commission based on the project. These advisory boards and commissions have regularly scheduled meetings in place during which they review projects, deliberate on issues, and hosts special events.

City boards and commissions meet regularly and provide opportunities for public participation in the planning and development review process. These are public meetings and a public comment period is

included on each agenda. Listed below are the boards and commissions in the City of Grand Rapids that work on the planning and development review process.

#### *Planning Commission*

The Planning Commission prepares and adopts physical plans for the City and reviews development proposals, both private and public as set forth in the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act () and the Michigan Planning Enabling Act ().

#### *Board of Zoning Appeals*

The Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) has the power to authorize, upon an appeal, specific variances from requirements such as lot area and width regulations, building height regulations, yard and depth regulations and off-street parking and loading space requirements. The BZA hears and decides questions that arise in the administration of the zoning ordinance including the interpretation of text and the zoning map.

#### *Historic Preservation Commission*

The Historic Preservation Commission is charged with overseeing the city's historic districts. The establishment of an historic district preserves the neighborhood's historic character and allows property owners with contributing properties the opportunity to apply for both federal and state tax credits.

The City is always looking for talented, committed people to serve on its boards and commissions. If you are interested, please contact the City Clerk's office and fill out an application. Vacancies are noted on the City website. The City strives to make sure our volunteers' experience is as productive and rewarding as possible. A complete list of boards and commissions, their responsibilities, meeting agendas and minutes can be found on the City's website.

#### *Public Comment*

Opportunities for public comment shall be available at any meeting of the City Commission or appointed boards and commissions in accordance with the provisions in the boards and commission's bylaws and other operating policies. Approved meeting minutes, which include the outcome of the public participation, are made available to the public through various methods, including being posted on the City's online meeting portal.

#### *Written Correspondence*

Written correspondence related to projects, including e-mail, is encouraged. Correspondence may be directed to the Planning Department generally ([planning@grcity.us](mailto:planning@grcity.us)) or may be addressed to the specific staff person when known. This contact information is identified on post card notices sent in advance of the public hearing. Any written correspondence received by the specified date prior to the public hearing is included as a part of the public record for consideration.

### *5.3 Involving Methods*

The goal of these involving methods is to work with the public to make sure that concerns and aspirations are considered and understood ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).

#### *Neighborhood Meeting*

The purpose of a neighborhood meeting is for an applicant or developer to educate occupants and owners of nearby properties about the proposed development application, receive comments, and address concerns about the development proposal; and resolve conflicts and outstanding issues, where possible.

The meeting is intended to result in a project that is responsive to neighborhood concerns and to expedite and lessen the expense of the review process by avoiding needless delays, appeals, remands or denials. A neighborhood meeting is strongly recommended for any project that may have an impact on neighboring properties such as a Special Land Use, Variance or Zone Change request and where a public hearing is required. They are not utilized for by-right development, except under special circumstances. A formal neighborhood meeting is not expected for small, individual requests (e.g. a variance for a porch); however neighbor-to-neighbor discussion is encouraged. Notices are not required to follow the notification area and timeframe as other Post Card Notices (see below); however the same standard is encouraged. Subject to availability, City staff may attend the meeting in an advisory capacity. The applicant is responsible to prepare summary minutes of the meeting and to submit them to the City as a part of the application materials. If substantial changes are made because of the neighborhood meeting or if changes occur after the meeting, a follow-up meeting is advised.

A neighborhood meeting is recommended for certain project types requiring Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and/or Historic Preservation Commission approval as stated in [Design & Development Departmental Policy DD-0001](#).

#### 5.4 Collaborative Methods

The goal of this voluntary collaborative method is to partner with the public in each aspect of the decision-making ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).

##### *Design Charrettes*

Design Charrettes are a voluntary component of the development process. A design charrette is an intense public involvement and design process intended to take community vision and input and create a preliminary development plan or series of guidelines from that vision. They can be an extremely useful tool for public engagement, particularly for large-scale projects or other high-impact developments. They are included as a recommended tool of the Area Specific Plan process under the 2002 City Master Plan. A good source of general information regarding Charrettes is the National Charrette Institute ([www.charretteinstitute.org](http://www.charretteinstitute.org)). An example of a charrette incorporated into the local planning process is the one held May 11, 2013 as a part of the Michigan Street Corridor Plan.

#### 6.0 Public Participation Enhancements

The Design & Development Department continues to evaluate options to enhance public participation, in partnership with community and business stakeholders. This strategy will be updated as needed to reflect enhancements as they are implemented.