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Residents and neighborhoods define Grand Rapids’ exceptional quality of life and distinct character. Charming homes interspersed among lively business districts keep Grand Rapids an attractive place to live, work and raise a family.

Several real estate studies show that the city continues to attract new residents to this growing community, including many first-time homebuyers. As the City continues to mature, there are several things property owners and renters can do to ensure that Grand Rapids protects the vitality of its quaint neighborhoods. Various home improvement projects (a fresh coat of paint on exterior structures, new plantings, maintained landscaping and debris-free yards) help keep homes looking good, protect property values and enhance the quality of life in neighborhoods.

This Grand Rapids Neighborhood Living Guide, compiled from common questions asked by residents to Grand Rapids 311 customer service representatives, provides a quick glimpse of the rules and regulations required of homeowners and renters. It also identifies typical property issues and identifies whether the homeowner or other agency (including the City of Grand Rapids) is responsible for resolving the issue.

For additional information on any of the following topics, please contact the City at 311 (or dial 616-456-3000) or visit the webpage at grcity.us.
Animals

- Dogs must be controlled in public by a leash.

- When walking a pet, waste must be cleared from, picked up, and disposed from all public places (including parks) and private property. No waste on a private property should be allowed to create a nuisance.

- All dogs shall be licensed with a license issued by Kent County.

- Dogs should have identification tags with owner contact information listed.

- Exotic animals cannot be kept as pets. Exotic animals are defined as those not occurring naturally in the City presently or historically, which are normally found in the wild.

- Vicious animals are not allowed.

- Clean up animal waste from the yard every day.

- Animal waste should be placed in a trash container ONLY, NOT in a recycling bin, street or catch basin.

Dogs must not bark excessively. To report barking dogs, call 311 or (616) 456-3000 to reach the non-emergency Police line.
• To remove wild animals from a private property, please contact a private company for resolution.

• To report deceased animals along roadways, please call 311 or (616) 456-3000.

• Property owners are responsible for preventing conditions that provide a home or food source for rats. Proactive rodent control includes:

  ▪ Remove all rubbish on property, including any piled close to buildings to expose burrows and openings.

  ▪ Store pet food in rat-proof containers, such as galvanized cans with tightfitting lids. This includes birdseed, grass seed, and other possible foods kept in garages and/or outbuildings.

  ▪ Store and dispose of garbage properly.

  ▪ If pets are fed outdoors, leave the food out for just long enough to be eaten, and then remove it.

  ▪ Remove old wood or rubbish from the property since these are regular rat hangouts.

Chickens may be kept (by permit only) in the rear yard of a single or two-family lot at least 3,800 square feet in size and confined in a fenced and covered enclosure. The coop shall not cover more than 50 percent of the rear yard and shall be at least 10 feet from any lot line. Chickens may not be killed on site and roosters are expressly prohibited.
• The Community Research Institute at Grand Valley State University maintains a list of Neighborhood Associations throughout the city of Grand Rapids. Visit www.cridata.org/Neighb_GR.aspx for a map and contact information.

• Grand Rapids has five Corridor Improvement Authorities in place to assist economic development and redevelopment in the Madison Square, North Quarter, Uptown and Westside commercial districts. A Business Improvement District is also in place within the Uptown business district that helps promote and encourage community and economic vitality and growth through marketing, development and enhanced services to the district. Visit the City’s Economic Development site at www.grcity.us for more information.

• Neighborhood Ventures, a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit, neighborhood-based community and economic development organization, works to bring greater vitality and success into neighborhood business districts. Visit www.neighborhoodventures.org for additional information.

Business and Neighborhood Associations

Grand Rapids has 32 great neighborhood associations and 19 business associations that team with citizens and entrepreneurs to build stronger neighborhoods and business districts.
Building and Renovations

All electronics inside the home should be protected via a surge protector. Electrical service disturbances, while not common, do occur and residents should take measures to protect their electronic investments by hooking each up to a surge protector and unplugging devices from an outlet when not in use.

- Homeowners and/or renters must secure a building permit for the following:
  - New buildings
  - Additions
  - Renovations (includes roofing and siding)
  - Demolitions
  - Prefabricated structures
  - Temporary buildings
  - Mobile homes
  - Electrical systems
  - Plumbing systems
  - HVAC systems (heating, ventilating, air-conditioning)
  - Miscellaneous for residential (fireplace, pools, decks, fences, etc.)
  - Miscellaneous for commercial (parking, health, food handling, etc.)
  - Accessory structures (dog houses/chicken coops) cannot exceed 8 ft. x 12 ft. in size.
  - Visit www.grcity.us to apply for permit
• Fire Prevention Steps – reducing clutter, keeping storage items away from furnaces and water heaters, maintaining a clear ingress and egress pathway open at all times.

• Smoke alarms should be placed in every bedroom and sleeping area, outside every sleeping area and on every level.

• Fire Hydrants – Residents are encouraged to assist firefighters by maintaining a clear path to fire hydrant open for firefighters. Clearing accumulated snow away from the hydrant is appreciated and is rewarded through www.mygrcitypoints.com. Residents must also remember never to park within 15 feet of a hydrant.

• Extreme caution must be exercised with all outdoor cooking.

• There is NO open burning in the City of Grand Rapids which includes the burning of leaves and the use of portable fire pits/Chimineas.

• The Residential Safety Program offers free smoke alarm installation for homeowners in their primary residence.
• Refuse and recycling carts shall be placed in the right-of-way or alley for service, as close as possible to the curb or right-of-way, keeping carts 3ft. away from any objects (including automobiles). The owner or occupant of the premises shall place the cart out for collection no earlier than 7 p.m. the day before the scheduled collection day and not later than 7 a.m. on the day of collection.

• On the day of collection, the empty carts shall be removed from the parkway and sidewalk line by the owner or occupant of the premises and shall be returned for storage to the side or rear yard of the premises.

• Do not store trash containers on the front porch, in the front yard or on the driveway.
“Green waste,” which consists of weeds, leaves, lawn clippings, hedge and shrubbery cuttings, small tree branches, and tree trimmings, wood, and sawdust shall be disposed of per City yard waste guidelines. Please visit www.grcity.us (keyword: yard waste) or call 311 (616-456-3000) for more information.

City refuse customers can change to a different size cart once a year at no cost. Subsequent changes or swaps will be subject to a $15 fee. Customers can swap carts at no cost by personally bringing carts to the Public Services Department at 201 Market Avenue SW between the hours of 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. or by calling 311 or 616-456-3000 to schedule a swap.

Hazardous waste disposal in City refuse carts is prohibited. For more information on hazardous waste disposal, contact Kent County at (616) 336-2570, the City at 311 or 616-456-3000.

Recycling = Rewards!

The City of Grand Rapids, in partnership with Local First, offers reward points to residents who recycle. The points are earned based on the average weight per cart on a neighborhood route. Ten points per average pound on that route is awarded to each participating household. Volunteers can also accumulate points by participating in various community improvement programs such as park clean ups, adopting catch basins, clearing snow from fire hydrants and more! Reward points can be redeemed at a variety of local businesses. To sign up and participate, visit www.mygrcitypoints.com.
• The maximum weight of any of the individual containers listed, including its contents shall not exceed the following pounds:
  ▪ 35 gallon: (60) lbs
  ▪ 64 gallon: (120) lbs
  ▪ 96 gallon: (180) lbs

• All refuse must be bagged before being placed in the refuse container.

• The contents of the refuse container are not to exceed the rim of the cart. The lid must shut and fit flush with the top of the cart. Oversized items must have a bulk sticker attached and be placed next to the refuse cart for collection on the regularly scheduled refuse collection day.

• The contents must be loosely packed to allow for proper tipping of the cart. Items remaining after collection should be loosened to allow for future removal at the next collection day.

• Refuse, recycling or yard waste cart service can be set up online at refuse.grcity.us, over the phone, or in person in the Monroe Lobby of City Hall.

• Purchase city refuse bags, bulk or appliance disposal tags, yard waste tags or bags in the Monroe lobby of City Hall: 300 Monroe Ave NW

• Add funds to a refuse account – phone/online/in-person/mail
• Some home-occupation businesses may be operated out of a residence provided there are no employees, signs, storage, commercial vehicles or equipment or on-site parking.

• Recurring or continual garage sales (i.e. every weekend) are not permitted. Residents are encouraged to hold no more than two sales per year of no more than three days duration each.

• Garage sale signs (or any other signs) are regulated by city ordinances and cannot be posted in the public right-of-way and must be removed after the event.

Residents do not need to obtain a permit to hold a garage sale.

• Homes should be routinely painted or coated to prevent surface deterioration with no visible signs of peeling paint. Paint chips may contain lead and shall be properly removed. Aluminum and vinyl siding and trim should be kept in good repair.
• Vacant houses must be kept properly secured with maintained yards.

• All buildings should be maintained in a structurally sound condition, with no sagging rooflines, worn or missing shingles, or tilted/bowed floors and walls.

• All building extensions and attachments, such as fences, porches, gutters and shutters, should be maintained. They should present an even, straight, and structurally sound appearance.

• Indoor furniture or furnishings, such as sofas, may not be placed in the yard or on an open porch.

• Garage doors should be free of peeling paint and dents, and should close tightly and securely.

• Driveways should be free of broken areas and hazardous conditions.

• Dealers are not permitted to operate in residential areas. Vehicle sales on private residential property are restricted by City Ordinances.

• Single-family homes are designed for traditional family units for the safety and comfort of those residing in the dwelling.

• All rental property or dwelling, not occupied by the owner, must be registered annually and must have a valid certificate of Compliance for occupancy. Vacant properties must also be registered annually. Properties can be registered online at www.grcity.us/codes.

• Parking in the front yard is prohibited.

• Noise and music may not exceed 25 decibels.
• Trash must be stored in a rigid container and removed from the property every seven days.

• Property owners are responsible for the upkeep of the alleyway abutting their property, width of the lot to the center of the alley.

• Grass must be cut regularly and may not exceed 12 inches in height.

• Some neighborhoods have posted seasonal odd/even parking requirements to assist in snow removal, meaning vehicles can only park on one side of the street on a particular day.

• Students living off campus are integral to the neighborhood’s quality of life and help support critical social infrastructure by helping neighbors in need, keeping noise to a minimum in respect for children and early risers, and maintaining their premises.

• No more than four unrelated persons may live together in a housing unit.

• If you experience problems with your unit, please first report them to your landlord. If the problem is not addressed, file a complaint online at www.grcity.us/codes.

Swimming pools must be in proper working order and, for public health reasons, must not contain stagnant water.
• All doors and windows to homes, outbuildings and vehicles should be locked and windows should be locked to prevent easy break-ins and criminal behavior.

• Trim tall or overgrown bushes and shrubs.

• Call 311 for non-emergency, 911 for emergency.

• Get to know your neighbors. Introduce yourself when new residents move in.

• Use lighting to help secure entrance points (front door, back door, door wall) to your home. Use energy-efficient lighting that is either motion or light sensitive. Turn porch, rear and garage lights on at night to provide visibility.

• Keep lawn mowers, bicycles and tools in a locked garage or shed. Do not leave personal items in view.

• Be vigilant and mindful of all activity in your neighborhood. Look out your windows on a regular basis and spend time enjoying the outdoors to deter crime.

• Share the Road! Motorists and those riding bicycles should observe the rules of the road. Mo-

Report suspicious behavior, such as someone loitering, sitting in parked cars, etc., to the Police Department by calling (616) 456-3400.
Tourists are asked to be alert for people biking on designated bike lanes.

• City ordinance prohibits parking in a marked bike lane in any manner that blocks or partially blocks a bike lane.

• Grand Rapids’ urban bike network (73 miles of dedicated bike lanes and growing), on-street bike facilities and repair stations have established a more robust biking culture throughout the community.

• Michigan state law requires all changes or transfers of ownership to be registered with the City Assessor’s office by filing a Property Transfer Affidavit within 45 days of the transfer (even if one is not recording a deed).

• In order to qualify for a Principal Residence Exemption (a.k.a. Homestead Exemption), a home must be owned and occupied by the owner by June 1. Please file the original Principal Residence Exemption Affidavit with the City Assessor (300 Monroe Ave NW).
• All vehicles should be parked in defined driveways and not in any yard areas. Vehicles should not be parked on the lawn or across the public sidewalk.

• All vehicles must abide by City of Grand Rapids neighborhood parking regulations (odd/even, neighborhood parking permits, etc.).

• Michigan’s Motor Vehicle Law requires that vehicles cannot be parked within 20 feet of a crosswalk or, if there is no crosswalk, within 15 feet of the intersection.

• Outdoor storage of one Recreational Vehicle (boat, boat trailer, utility trailer, travel trailer, motor home, or similar vehicle) under 25 ft. in length is permitted in residential areas in the rear yard, or if not possible, on the side yard, but not closer than 4 ft. from the lot line and screened from the adjacent property by a 6 ft. fence or hedge.

• One RV may be parked on a driveway (May 1–Oct. 31, provided the vehicle is in good condition, does not exceed 20 ft. in length and is parked at least 6 ft. from any structure, adjacent property or 15 ft. from the front lot line.

RVs cannot be occupied or repaired in a residential area.
• Commercial vehicles and equipment may not be parked or stored in residential areas of the city. Trucks exceeding 3/4 ton and used for commercial purposes are considered commercial vehicles, as are semi truck trailers, step vans, cube vans, and any other vehicle capable of a payload of more than one ton.

• No unlicensed and/or junk vehicles should be parked on the property other than in the garage. Major vehicle repairs, such as engine and transmission overhauls and bodywork that require extensive time to complete, should not be attempted and are not permitted.

• The parking of personal vehicles (new or used) for purposes of sale is not permitted on commercial, industrial or public properties.

• To receive a free library card, you must live within the city limits. Bring a photo I.D. with your current address to any GRPL location to receive your card. Don’t forget to get a card for your children!
Your library card provides you with free access to books, movies, music, and one hour of computer time each day. The library’s digital collections include eBooks, eAudiobooks, streaming movies and music, digital magazines and research databases.

All GRPL locations have free wi-fi.

The Grand Rapids Public Library offers free programs, classes, and workshops.

The Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department houses an extensive archive of Grand Rapids history and is available to researchers and genealogists on Level 4 of the Main Library.

The Small Business Resource Center offers free assistance to people interested in starting or growing a small business.

Visit www.grpl.org or call 616-988-5400 for hours of operation and to learn more about the programs and services offered at the library.

The Grand Rapids Public Library, our community’s foremost source for information, viewpoints, resources, and programs, has eight locations throughout the city:

- **Main Library**
  111 Library Street NE
- **Madison Square**
  1201 Madison SE
- **Ottawa Hills**
  1150 Giddings SE
- **Seymour**
  2350 Eastern SE
- **Van Belkum**
  1563 Plainfield NE
- **West Leonard**
  1017 Leonard NW
- **West Side**
  713 Bridge NW
- **Yankee Clipper**
  2025 Leonard NE
Quality of Life Services

- Bicycle License Program – Free bike licenses are available at all Grand Rapids Fire Stations from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. Applicants must bring their bike and fill out a short form to receive a license.

- Car Seat Installation and Inspection – Safe Kids of Greater Grand Rapids (616-391-7233) inspects and installs car seats at the Kalamazoo Avenue Station (2451 Kalamazoo Ave SE) the fourth Thursday of the month from 12:00-3:30 pm.

- Individuals cannot be discriminated against on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, disability, age or familial or marital status. To report suspected housing discrimination, contact the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan at (616) 451-2980.

- Few cities the size of Grand Rapids can match the depth and breadth of our museum facilities. Downtown alone contains five museums within a few blocks of each other: Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum, Grand Rapids Art Museum, Grand Rapids Children’s Museum, Grand Rapids Public Museum and Urban Institute of Contemporary Arts. Just minutes away is one of the world’s Top 30 Must-See Museums: Frederik}

Civil defense and tornado sirens are tested on the first Friday of every month at noon, April through October.
Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, a breathtaking display of natural and manmade art.

• Grand Rapids is a city on the leading edge of art, culture, dining and nightlife. Visit www.experiencegr.com and www.downtowngr.org for listings of great restaurants, calendars of events, happenings and more!

• Sidewalks must be free from snow and ice. Residents must clear their sidewalk within 48 hours following the conclusion of a snow event.

• Report any damaged or hazardous sidewalks to the Sidewalks Division for evaluation and repair, at 311 or (616) 456-3000

The Grand Rapids Treasurer’s Office ensures the convenient, timely, and accurate billing and collection of taxes and fees.

• Customer Service: (616) 456-3020
• Water Bills: (616) 456-3200
• Income Tax: (616) 456-3415
• Assessor: (616) 456-3081

• Online Payments for Tax, Water, Refuse Cart PAYT and be made online at www.grcity.us/epay-bills or in-person at 300 Monroe Ave. NW, Room 220. Office hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.
Grand Rapids is one of twenty-two Michigan Cities whose citizens have approved a local city income tax.

There are three types of taxpayers; residents, nonresidents and corporations (including partnerships). Also, employers located or “doing business” in the city are required to withhold tax from wages paid to employees.

Individuals who live in the city (residents) are taxed on all of their income (same as federal with a few exceptions) regardless of where the income is earned. Residents working in another city that has adopted a local city income tax (i.e., Walker) can claim a credit for tax paid to the other city on the same income earned while a resident of Grand Rapids.

Nonresidents are taxed on the income earned within the city. Nonresidents who work both in and outside the city for an employer are allowed to allocate income based on where they work and only the wages earned in the city are subject to tax.

Self-employed nonresidents and corporations are taxed on their net profit/loss from business activity in the city.

The City offers a free online Tax Tool that can be used to prepare a City of Grand Rapids Form GR-1040.
• The website for the Income Tax Department is www.grcity.us/incometax and income tax forms can be downloaded from our website at www.grcity.us/taxforms. Tax questions for the following types of income tax returns can be emailed to:

- Individual tax questions Form 1040 grtax@grcity.us
- Partnership tax questions Form 1065 gr1065tax@grcity.us
- Corporation tax questions Form 1120 gr1120tax@grcity.us
- Withholding tax questions Form W-3 grwhtax@grcity.us

• Income tax assistance can also be obtained by visiting the Income Tax Department located on the Third Floor of City Hall at 300 Monroe Ave NW or by calling (616) 456-3415 during regular business hours.

“Street Trees,” those typically located in the public right of way between the sidewalk and street are maintained and pruned on a regular basis by the City of Grand Rapids.
• Trees located on private property are the responsibility of the homeowner/renter. Pruning, removal and, of course, leaf pickup duties are the responsibility of the homeowner.

• Trees located in the easement and those that interfere with power lines are the responsibility of the utility company. Residents should always stay clear of downed lines and contact Consumers Energy immediately (1-800-477-5050) to report the issue.

• “Street” trees and branches that fall or are downed due to a storm event will be picked up by the City of Grand Rapids. Those trees damaged and located on private property are the responsibility of the homeowner.

• Tree Planting – The City focuses their efforts into planting every vacant space available, neighborhood-by-neighborhood. The plan focuses first on areas with low canopy cover. The planting plan is available to the public on the Forestry Division’s section of the website at www.grcity.us/parks/Pages/Forestry.aspx.

  ▪ Opt-Out – if one prefers not to wait until a neighborhood will be planted, an option exists to file a permit to plant a tree in the public right of way.

Tree Removal – Please report any diseased, dead, or structurally unsound trees in the public right of way to the Forestry Division at 311 or (616) 456-3000.
• Water System Responsibility – The property owner’s responsibility begins at the property line after the curb stop, continues through the yard to the building/home, and throughout the home. The Water System is responsible for the service line from the water main in the street to the curb stop, the couplings on either side of the meter within the home or in an outside pit, and the meter itself.

• Service Line Insurance Plans – From time to time, private companies will contact or mail residents offers to purchase service line insurance. The City does not endorse nor is affiliated with any of these offerings. More information is available at grcity.us, keyword: service line insurance

• Water Meter – No person other than an authorized employee of the Water System shall move or interfere with the water meter in any way. Meters must be accessible to Water System employees as requested and must be free of obstacles. The property owner is responsible to prevent damage, theft, or other disturbances to the meter or meter reading equipment; inoperable equipment will be charged back to the owner. To prevent frozen meters, please remember to supply adequate heat
to the area that your meter is located.

• New Account Information – With every new account change at an address, a Water/Sewer Utility Agreement must be filled out and submitted back to the Utility Business Office with a copy of the new account holder’s photo ID. Contact 311 or (616) 456-3000 to obtain the form or with additional questions.

  (Please note an owner must submit a Utility Agreement for their tenant.)

• Water and sewer utilities are billed on a quarterly basis (every 3 months) for residential and most commercial accounts, with the additional option for residents to pay their quarterly bill in three monthly installments.

  • Payment options include but are not limited to:

    ▪ EZ Pay – Sign up for automatic deduction from your checking or savings account grcity.us/ezpay
    ▪ Online - grcity.us/epaybills
    ▪ In Person - Grand Rapids City Hall, 300 Monroe Avenue NW, Monroe Level Storefront, 49403
    ▪ By Mail – Attn: Grand Rapids City Treasurer, 300 Monroe Ave. NW, Suite 220, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

• Unpaid water/sewer bills – Under Michigan Law, unpaid water and sewer bills become a lien on the property and are added to the tax roll. This means they will be included on the property tax bill, which if not paid can eventually result in foreclosure. Property owners and prospective owners

  Online Bill Presentation and Payment Options can be found at grcity.us/eServices (You can opt to go paperless and receive e-mail notifications when a new bill is issued!) Receive mygrcitypoints for going paperless!
should know and understand the State Lien Law for this reason. Prospective homebuyers should carefully check for any unpaid water/sewer charges on the property in question or work with their title insurance company in this regard. More information is available at www.grcity.us/AddToTax

Many leaks occur in the toilet due to an unsecure seal at the bottom of the tank, and can result in large volumes of water wasted and significant increases in your water/sewer bills. Leaks in the toilet can often go undetected, because water continues to fill the tank, empties to the bowl, and exits to the sewer. To test your toilet seal, put a small amount of food coloring, coffee, or Kool-Aid in the tank of your toilet, if the color shows in the bowl, you should look to have your seal replaced. Leaks are the responsibility of the property owner and although the water may have not been used intentionally, there is still a cost to clean, deliver, receive, and treat the used product, which may result in an unforeseen large bill. If you see your volume increasing, you may wish to contact a plumber or check your pipes for drips, leaks, and breaks. Visit www.grcity.us/leaks for help.
• Grass and shrub areas should be mowed, trimmed and kept weed-free. No lawn areas should be allowed to grow to a height greater than 12 inches. Mowing and trimming of ditch lines, alleys, and right-of-way areas adjacent to the roadway, is also expected.

• All types of landscaping should be kept neat and clean. Diseased or dead landscaping should be removed.

• Yard areas should be free of litter, junk, debris, and scrap storage.

• Landscaping must be installed at a new home within one year of occupancy.

• Firewood shall be stacked neatly at least eight inches off the ground, no higher than 6 feet and 3 feet from the side lot line.

• Composting is allowed only in the backyard of occupied residential dwellings in accordance with the following:

  • The compost may not contain animal waste, meat, bones, grease, oils, fats, or cooked foods of any kind.
• The compost must be completely contained in a fully enclosed compost receptacle having a capacity no greater than 64 cubic feet.

• The compost receptacle shall be constructed of rigid and durable materials, which shall not include any of the following: burlap, tarp, vehicle tires, wire mesh, chicken wire, flexible fencing material of any kind, or any substantially similar materials; and must be kept tightly covered except when opened for deposit or removal of compost materials.

• Refrigerators and freezers may not be stored without removing or securing the doors.

• Bushes and shrubs must be trimmed so vision is not obstructed and pedestrian traffic is not interfered with along sidewalks and driveways.

• Site Restoration – Please help improve restoration efforts by watering grass seed in the parkway at the end of a construction project.
Your first stop for all non-emergency City of Grand Rapids service questions, including:

- Water
- Property Tax
- Pothole Reports
- Pay As You Throw Refuse

One number – dial 311 from your cell phone or landline

In person – assistance is available at City Hall Lobby, 300 Moroe NW

Live Assistance – five days a week
8 a.m. - 5 p.m., Monday to Friday

Online – visit 311.grcity.us from your laptop, computer or smartphone

If you are unable to reach 311 or you are calling from outside the city limits, you can dial 616-456-3000
For TTY, call 616-456-3980

Questions or suggestions? Please visit 311.grcity.us

In case of emergency, call 911.