

Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission

Grand Rapids Mayor and City Councilors

420 North Pokegama Avenue
Grand Rapids, Minnesota

Commission Recommendation: Strengthening Accessibility Advocacy and Planning

Dear Mayor and Councilors,

The Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission thanks the City for its efforts with regard to protecting human rights, including providing appropriate accessibility of buildings and public spaces for people with disabilities, a protected class under the Minnesota Human Rights law. As a Commission, we also believe there is an opportunity for our city to go further in our commitment to accessible public spaces in the city. We recommend that the City consider taking a more active role in shaping the future of accessibility standards by designating or hiring a qualified staff member who would:

- **Be fully informed about and involved in state-level code development**, including technical advisory groups, code hearings, and collaboration with the Minnesota Accessibility Specialist;
- **Perform an accessibility audit of city facilities and spaces** using third-party accessibility audit criteria established by AIA, OSHA and MN-OSHA, and NFPA.

The results of the preceding should be used to inform future city planning and capital improvements to existing and future public buildings and spaces.

Currently, some of the accessibility improvement efforts are researched and advocated by volunteers. Community engagement is vital and should continue. However sustainable, systemic progress requires dedicated capacity on issues tied to acceptable access for people with disabilities. By investing in staff-level leadership, the City would:

- Ensure consistent, informed advocacy aligned with our community values;
- Strengthen coordination between local implementation and evolving formal standards, thereby demonstrating a clear commitment that goes beyond baseline compliance and demonstrates leadership with regard to accessibility for people with disabilities.

As a commission, we welcome the opportunity to collaborate on this effort and ask that the Council consider specifically incorporating responsibility for ensuring disabled-person accessibility into an existing role (e.g., within Planning, Public Works, or Community Development departments) or contracted support.

Accessibility design improves usability, safety, and comfort for everyone in our community. Thank you for considering this recommendation toward a more accessible Grand Rapids.

Sincerely,

Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission