

Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission

Mayor and Members of the Grand Rapids City Council

420 North Pokagama Avenue

Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Recommendation to City Council: Strengthening Local Leadership in Accessibility Advocacy and Planning

Dear Mayor and City Council Members,

On behalf of the Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission, we want to thank the City for fulfilling its responsibilities by enforcing state and federal building codes related to accessibility. We also believe there is a timely and meaningful opportunity for our community to go further, and lead by example in our commitment to inclusion and accessibility.

We respectfully recommend that the City consider a more active role in shaping the future of accessibility standards by designating or hiring a qualified staff member to:

- **Participate in state-level code development**, including technical advisory groups, code hearings, and collaboration with the Minnesota Accessibility Specialist;
- **Explore and evaluate accessibility audit opportunities** for City-owned spaces, including:
 - What types of audits exist and their scope (ADA, architectural, digital, etc.);
 - Whether audits can be conducted internally or require third-party support;
 - Estimated costs, timelines, and implementation considerations;
 - How audit findings might inform future planning and capital improvements.

Currently, these research and advocacy efforts are often shouldered by volunteers. While community engagement is vital, we recognize that sustainable, systemic progress requires dedicated capacity – particularly on issues tied to civil rights, safety, and equitable 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 state standards;
- Demonstrate a clear commitment to accessibility leadership, not just baseline compliance.

We welcome the opportunity to collaborate on this effort and ask that the Council consider whether this responsibility could be incorporated into an existing role (e.g., within Planning, Public Works, Community Development) or whether the scope warrants new or contracted support.

Accessibility and inclusive design improve usability, safety, and comfort for everyone in our community. Thank you for your continued partnership and for considering this step toward a more inclusive, accessible Grand Rapids.

Sincerely,

The Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission