

Downtown Amphitheater Project: Frequently Asked Questions

Background

Why is an amphitheater being proposed?

- The development of an amphitheater on the Grand River is the culmination of numerous studies and several years of engagement. A desire to maximize public enjoyment of the river is a key theme in the City's 2002 *Master Plan* and 2015 *GR Forward Downtown & River Action Plan*, and the amphitheater is a centerpiece in making that vision a reality.
- In 2017, the Destination Asset Study conducted by Convention, Sports and Leisure International identified that a large-scale outdoor amphitheater could fill a gap in the live entertainment industry in West Michigan. The proposed amphitheater will not only draw visitors to the city but expand public access to the river and catalyze future development in the area.

How is the amphitheater different from other event venues in the city that already exist?

- Performers schedule performances by venue type and size. For example, while the Frederick Meijer Gardens has an amphitheater, it seats 1,900 people, which attracts a different type of performer than the proposed amphitheater at 12,000 seats.
- Research has shown that crossover between the proposed amphitheater and existing venues such as Van Andel Arena and Frederick Meijer Garden would be limited. The city would gain 24 major concerts per year with the addition of the amphitheater.

Where will the amphitheater be located? Why was this location selected?

- The amphitheater is proposed to be located at 201 Market Avenue SW, a roughly 17-acre site located on the east side of the Grand River bounded on the west by Market Avenue, the north by US-131 and the south by the railroad.
- Grand Action and CAA studied numerous sites within Grand Rapids and Kent County before this one was selected.

What are the benefits of this project?

- *Recreation and entertainment.* The amphitheater will host events for visitors and residents that enhance the vibrancy of downtown. The development takes a largely underutilized site on the Grand River and activates it, opening it to the public for use. The north end of the site features a park and the Riverwalk will extend alongside the site.
- *Non-motorized connectivity* is a key element to the success of the development being proposed. The site contains just over 1,500 linear feet of frontage along the Grand River and presents a great opportunity to connect to the existing Riverwalk north of US-131 and build essential connections to Kent Trails and the White Pine Trail. Development of Riverwalk on these properties will improve non-motorized circulation downtown, alleviate vehicular traffic congestion, and offer space for the public to enjoy the Grand River.
- *Economic.* The amphitheater is projected to generate over \$7 million in annual wage earnings in the city and \$474 million in new net economic impact in Kent County over the next 30 years. An estimated 480 jobs will be created thanks to the amphitheater project – 345 net new city and 480 net new county operation and construction jobs over 30 years.
- *Ancillary development.* The amphitheater is a catalytic development that will facilitate the viability of ancillary residential and mixed-use development. A later phase of the development will be mixed-use properties with an estimated 1,500-1,700 housing units.

These homes will help to meet the housing gap of 7,951 rental units and 6,155 for-sale units that Grand Rapids is projected to have over the next five years (see [Kent County Housing Needs Assessment 2023](#)).

Who is developing the amphitheater?

- Grand Action 2.0 is a not-for-profit economic development organization who is working on developing, assisting, and raising funds for the amphitheater.
- Progressive AE is the executive architect of record for the project, providing design, engineering, and planning services for the development of the amphitheater.
- The Grand Rapids Kent County Convention/Arena Authority (CAA) will own and operate the amphitheater, along with partner booking agents, when it is complete.

How does the creation of a downtown amphitheater advance the goals of the City of Grand Rapids *Master Plan* and *GR Forward Downtown and River Action Plan*?

- The City’s [Master Plan](#) outlines strategies to create and enhance the city’s business districts, foster a strong economy, improve quality of life, increase access to the Grand River, and use strategic partnerships to guide land use policy and action in the city. The proposed amphitheater advances numerous goals of the *Master Plan*, including:
 - Continue to reinforce Downtown’s role as the multipurpose urban center for the metropolitan region. (VB1)
 - Capitalize on the Grand River as an asset for economic development and quality of life by encouraging a change in land use along the riverfront from industry to open space and mixed-use. (SE1)
 - Encourage major institutions to remain and grow in a mixed-use context in Downtown and on its edges. (SE4)
 - Make the Grand River a recreational, aesthetic, economic and historic focus of the city. (EOL1)
 - Promote the development of a system of green ways along tributary streams to the Grand River, as well as on-street pedestrian and bicycle corridors, to link all city neighborhoods to the river, major destinations, and regional trail systems. (EOL2)
 - Expand open space and recreational opportunities. (EOL3)
 - Recognize the arts as an essential resource to be nurtured and supported. (EOL7)
 - Encourage intergovernmental and public/private cooperation in decisions concerning the location of developments of greater than local impact (e.g., major new shopping centers, employment centers, cultural facilities). (P1f)
- The amphitheater will also help actualize several of the goals of the [GR Forward Downtown and River Action Plan](#), including:
 - Goal 1.4 Enhance neighborhood access to the river.
 - Goal 3.1 Provide a stress-free pedestrian experience for all ages and abilities.
 - Goal 4: Expand job opportunities and ensure continued vitality of the local economy.
 - Goal 5.1 Expand arts and cultural events and temporary programming to further activate the public realm year-round.

Is this also a soccer stadium?

- The amphitheater is a different venue than the soccer stadium. A soccer stadium is being considered for another location in downtown Grand Rapids.

Site

What will the seating capacity of the amphitheater be?

- The amphitheater will seat 12,000 people. In addition to the main stage and seating, there will be concessions, a food and beverage plaza, and an entrance plaza off the Grand River.
- It is anticipated that there will be 7,000 fixed seats and 5,000 lawn seats.

Will there be parking on-site?

- The amphitheater is located on Market Avenue. A 116-space parking lot is planned for the site to accommodate patrons.
- Significant parking resources exist within walking distance of the amphitheater site. In addition to surface lots and garages offering public parking, select lots owned by public and private owners are available for evening or weekend use. The City of Grand Rapids also offers on-street parking available to visitors. There are approximately 18,500 parking spaces within a 15-minute walk of the amphitheater. [Mobile GR](#) maintains a list of all parking facilities in the city's downtown.
- The use of other modes of transportation to get to and from the amphitheater is encouraged to help mitigate vehicular traffic. The amphitheater is on the 8 and 12 [Rapid](#) bus lines, there is a [DASH](#) bus stop located at the site and Central Station is within walking distance. The City also has a [Bike and Scooter Share Program](#) that attendees can utilize to get to and from the amphitheater.
- Bicycle parking will be available on site.

How will people access the amphitheater for events?

- The entrance on Market Avenue will serve as the main entry point to the venue during events. An entrance from the new Riverwalk will serve as a future entry point to the venue during events.

Where will vehicular traffic come from to the site?

- Vehicles are expected to access the site by taking US-131, exiting at the Pearl Street or Market Avenue exits.

How will the City manage and mitigate traffic? What will happen at the interchanges?

- The City of Grand Rapids is committed to a balanced transportation network that advances walking, biking, and transit use in addition to driving, especially in the city's downtown. The policy of the city is that a downtown venue such as the amphitheater does not need to provide on-site parking for all attendees.

What about accessing the site via the river?

- A future goal is to have a kayak put-in site on the Grand River near the amphitheater.

Where will city staff and programming move for those departments currently headquartered on the site? (Parks and Recreation, etc.)

- Staff and programming will be moving to the former Kent County Road Commission Operations Facility on Scribner Avenue.

Operations

Who will be managing the amphitheater?

- The Grand Rapids Kent County Convention/Arena Authority (CAA) will own and maintain the amphitheater, along with partner booking agents.
- The DeVos Place Convention Center, DeVos Performance Hall, and Van Andel Arena are also managed by the CAA.

What types of events will be hosted at the amphitheater?

- Music concerts, community events, and other private events will be hosted at the amphitheater. These could include cultural festivals, World of Winter, ArtPrize, movie screenings, and more.

Will the facility be open year-round?

- Year-round programming is intended. The majority of this programming will be different from summer concert use, and dependent upon the final design of the venue.

When will the major events occur?

- Major events will likely occur on evenings and weekends. However, we anticipate usage any day of the week to accommodate tour routing.

How many events can be anticipated in a season? (Including concerts, community events, other private events)

- At least 54 ticketed events per season are expected with a projected 300,000 visitors, both concerts and community events. Other events will likely be held throughout the year.

Will there be opportunity for local acts to perform at the amphitheater?

- All event and performance types will be looked at to provide an inclusive, dynamic, and multi-genre experience. The facility will be available for anyone to rent based on the booking policy and availability.

How will the space be used on days when no events are scheduled? Will there be security on days when there are no events?

- A pedestrian plaza is planned along Market Avenue, which will be open during event and non-event times. While the venue itself will be closed during non-event times, the current vision is for the plaza and green space to be available to the public as park space when no events are scheduled. Concessions may also be open to the public during non-event times.
- The venue and grounds will have security and video surveillance on event and non-event days.

How late will events go at the amphitheater?

- Events are expected to run no later than midnight.

How will sound from events impact adjacent properties?

- Numerous strategies are being employed to mitigate the impact of sound on adjacent properties. First, the site is designed so sound will be directed north toward a berm (hill) and U-S 131 also acts as a natural sound barrier as it borders the site directly to the north.
- The amphitheater sound is expected to disperse over the river naturally and the orientation of the stage and shape of the amphitheater directs the sound away from the residential buildings and neighborhoods to the south.
- A sound study was done to capture existing sound levels on site and projected levels. Baseline sound readings were taken on-site over a 48-hour period and ranged between 48 and 73 dBA (decibels) with an average of 66 dBA.
- The sound intensity leaving the site is 72 to 77 dBA, equivalent to the sound of a washing machine or noisy restaurant. The intensity of the sound is contained within the shape of the amphitheater and significantly drops after leaving the bowl.
- The projected sound measurements north of the expressway are in the 62 to 67 dBA range, equal to a normal conversation or a dishwasher.
- These represent sounds that would be heard outside of a building space (e.g., classroom, office, apartment) not inside.

Miscellaneous

How is sustainability being considered in the design and operations of the amphitheater?

- We intend to incorporate many sustainable features into the design of the proposed amphitheater.
- We hope to utilize green roofs and retentive planters which will help improve the site from a stormwater quality perspective and help moderate the heat island effect that is common in many urban developments. The existing site is largely impervious surface and lacks provisions for water quality. The proposed project will bring the site into alignment with the City ordinance by providing a substantial increase in green space, tree canopy, and stormwater management.
- Additionally, by providing less parking on-site and encouraging the use of public transit, scooters, bicycles, and carpooling, we will mitigate carbon emissions generated by attendees.

How is equity being considered?

- The amphitheater project design contains many of the foundational elements of the [River Equity Framework](#) developed by Grand River Voices. The River Equity Framework centers community, inclusivity, transparency, and an equitable future for all Grand Rapidans.
- Grand Action 2.0 shares the value and purpose designed by the River Equity Framework to ensure broad community access to, benefit from, and enjoyment of our river, surrounding public greenspaces and waterfront development.

Would the CAA consider using excess proceeds from the operational revenues to reinvest in the 3rd Ward?

- While the CAA would not be allowed to gift funds to the city, the CAA would consider building and engaging in the 3rd Ward for future projects.

Will there be a way to donate online/through the project websites?

- More information regarding public donations and participation will be identified during the fundraising phase of the pre-project events.

Next Steps

What is the project timeline?

- The amphitheater is currently in the schematic design phase of the project. Land acquisition and zoning approval is expected in summer 2023, with the city's relocation commencing in Spring of 2024. The goal is for the amphitheater to open in May 2026.

What community engagement is being done?

- Learnings from prior studies, nine in total, have been taken into consideration in planning the downtown amphitheater. All of those studies had numerous community engagement sessions and opportunities for public input.
- 26 one on one engagement sessions were held as part of the early planning for the project in 2020.
- A series of 5 focus groups with students, business owners, community leaders, and other residents and professionals were held in June 2022 as part of the "proof-of-concept" phase.
- Members of the amphitheater development and design team will be attending neighborhood and business association meetings to make presentations. A community open house for the public is planned with in-person and virtual options.

Has the City of Grand Rapids approved the project yet?

- No. There are several steps in the approval process: zoning, engineering, and building. The amphitheater project is seeking Special Land Use approval from the City of Grand Rapids Planning Commission. The [Grand Action 2.0 website](#) and [City of Grand Rapids Planning Commission website](#) will be updated with details in the future.