

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR

# Riverfront Sites on the Market Avenue Corridor



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
FEBRUARY 24, 2021

**POPULOUS**  
+  
progressive | ae

**“Our job was to envision and evaluate which assets will bring the greatest community benefit,”** said Grand Action 2.0 co-chair Tom Welch. “With a proposed 10 acres of accessible public space, including a ribbon of parkland along the riverfront, the final recommendations placed strong emphasis on community access and green spaces.”>>

# Executive Summary

## **2021 represents a unique moment in time for the City of Grand Rapids and the surrounding region.**

The purpose of the Riverfront Conceptual Planning effort was to create a comprehensive vision for future development on the east bank of the Grand River between Fulton and Wealthy Streets, transforming it from a site that lacks activation and connectivity into a showcased, sustainable district that connects and serves a diverse community.

With millions of dollars of public / private investment in downtown in the past 10 years, Grand Rapids Whitewater implementation underway, and major businesses and universities taking root in downtown, it's time for Grand Rapids to consider how it can build and sustain this unique momentum. Diversifying downtown and the regional economy as well as attracting and retaining talent are vital objectives.

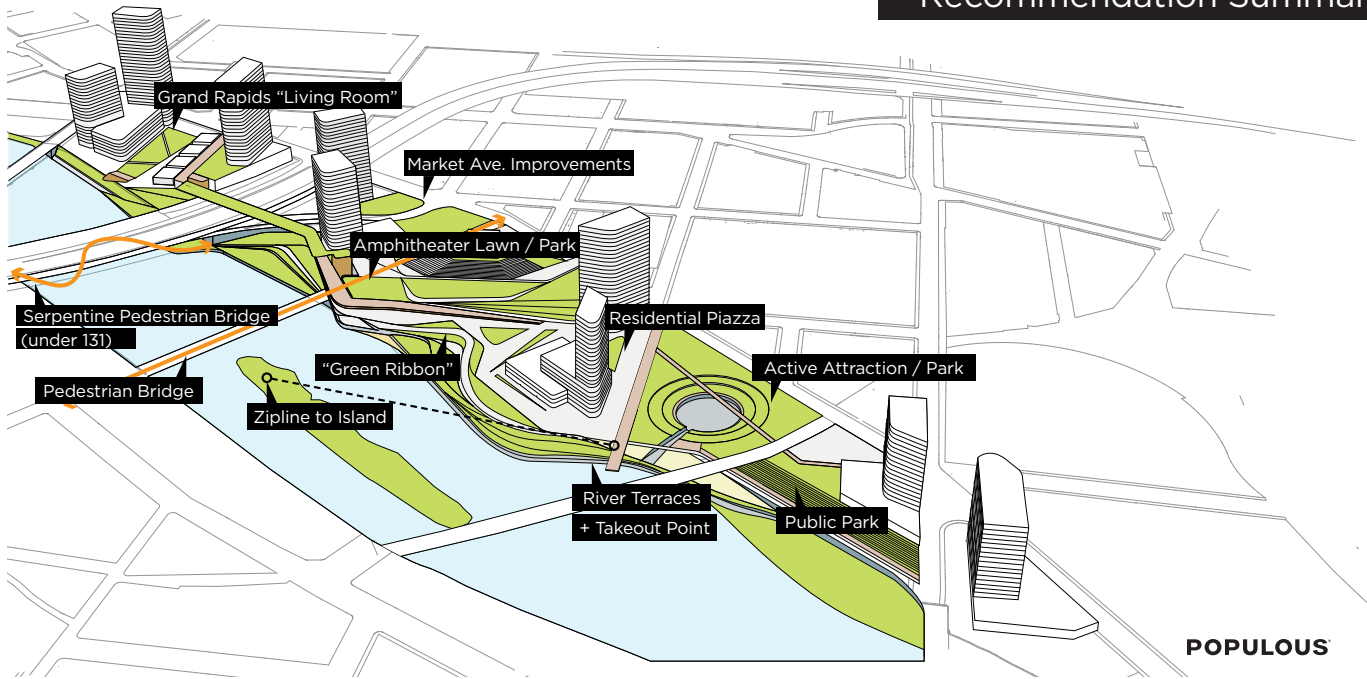
While many reports and studies have been commissioned by a variety of stakeholders over the years, no cohesive master plan for the entire 31-acre riverfront site has ever been created. This Riverfront Conceptual Planning effort considers all elements of the site together, including the Fulton and Market Site, 201 Market Sites, the riverfront, Market Avenue Corridor, as well as new supportable market uses identified by CSL in 2020 as part of the Grand Rapids Destination Asset Study. These uses could include:

- **Amphitheater**
- **Traditional Mixed-Use District**
- **Trend Forward Mixed-Use**
- **Outdoor Adventure**
- **Signature Public Space**
- **Arts and Culture Park**
- **Urban Water Features**
- **Outdoor Education Center**
- **Immersive Art Experience**
- **Downtown Aquarium**
- **Unique Hospitality Experience**

The Design Team focused on providing public open space and strategic mixed-use development accompanied by the corresponding infrastructure and circulation improvements that would optimize and activate the riverfront sites. This process was led and funded by Grand Action, working together with the City of Grand Rapids and Skot Welch of Global Bridge Builders to engage the community in an open and transparent process.

The goal was to create a catalytic vision that will improve quality of life for today's Grand Rapidians and guide the next phase of downtown development for the next generation. A collaborative effort undertaken by Populous and Progressive AE has resulted in the following project recommendations for the riverfront sites:

- **10+ acres of new public open space connected to the Grand River**
- **Alternatives for new pedestrian connections to the west side of the Grand River**
- **The Grand Rapids "Green Ribbon": an elevated and dedicated riverfront park connecting to the river trail system between Fulton and Wealthy Streets**
- **Adventure park, kayak pit-stop, zipline and seasonal attraction or cultural park**
- **Community green space to accommodate multi-generational gatherings and activities**
- **Ground floor retail and trend-forward mixed-use prioritized for minority-owned businesses**
- **12,000-seat amphitheater on 201 Market Site**
- **Up to 1,500 - 1,750 mixed housing units, with a dedicated site at Wealthy and Market Ave for affordable housing on the park and river**
- **1,675 new parking spaces to support mixed-use and other functions**
- **Recommended sites for future downtown development of housing, soccer venue or aquarium**



### Community Engagement and Input

The Conceptual Planning for Riverfront Sites in Downtown Grand Rapids began in October of 2020 with a public engagement process that included 26 one-on-one interviews with community groups, foundations, elected officials and a variety of other downtown stakeholders. Four community-only focus groups, organized by Skot Welch of Global Bridge Builders, were also conducted virtually with 15-20 participants, each with a combination of the following participant backgrounds:

- **Hispanic Chamber**
- **Latina Network of West Michigan**
- **Influencers in the Asian Community**
- **Native American Community**
- **Civil servants**
- **Entrepreneurs**
- **Small business administrators**
- **Housing representatives**
- **Realtors**
- **Teachers**
- **School administrators**
- **Social justice ambassadors**
- **Health care representatives**
- **Single parents**

The outcomes of these community engagement sessions helped the planning team identify desires, pain points and ideas for the future. Themes that emerged and influenced the planning efforts included (in order of desirability, 1 = most desirable / repeated theme):

- **Riverfront activation and free-and-clear access to the water**
- **Local, minority-owned pop-up restaurants, shops, bars, music venues / clubs, etc. (on the river)**
- **Publicly accessible and multi-seasonal open space, parks, picnic pavilions, etc.**
- **Funding strategy for diverse programming opportunities**
- **Multigenerational spaces and places**
- **Bike trails**
- **Public Art**
- **Housing**
- **Amphitheater, soccer venue and / or aquarium downtown**
- **Adequate parking**