



CITY ATTORNEY

City of Grand Rapids, MI

Recruitment Services Provided By





The Opportunity

This is a rare opportunity for a seasoned municipal law leader to serve as Grand Rapids' chief legal officer at a time when the City's ambitions, and the legal complexity that comes with them, are significant. The next City Attorney will advise an engaged, high-profile City Commission and a large, multi-faceted organization, providing clear, trusted counsel that protects the City's interests while enabling effective governance. For a leader who combines strong people management with sound judgment, proactive communication, and the confidence to operate in consequential "gray space," this role offers meaningful influence, visible impact, and the chance to shape how a major Michigan city navigates risk, innovation, and equity in the years ahead.

The City of Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids, Michigan is a dynamic and welcoming community that has emerged as one of the Midwest's most compelling places to live, work, and build a career. With approximately 200,000 residents, it is Michigan's second largest city. Situated along the Grand River roughly 25 miles east of Lake Michigan, Grand Rapids is the economic and cultural hub of West Michigan. Its central location – about three hours from Chicago or Detroit – paired with convenient air and rail access through Gerald R. Ford International Airport and Amtrak, makes the region highly connected while still offering a strong sense of place.

The region is widely recognized for its strong and diversified economy, consistently ranked among the fastest-growing in the country. Anchored by major employers in healthcare, manufacturing, education, and technology, Grand Rapids blends economic opportunity with a relatively low cost of living. This balance makes it especially attractive for professionals and families seeking career growth without sacrificing affordability, quality of life, or community connection.

Outdoor recreation is woven into daily life in Grand Rapids. Residents enjoy easy access to miles of trails, scenic riverfronts, and more than 60 city parks offering year-round recreational opportunities. Within a short drive are Lake Michigan's renowned white sand beaches, while winter brings nearby skiing and seasonal outdoor activities. Whether boating, biking, hiking, or simply enjoying the changing seasons, the natural amenities of West Michigan are a defining feature of the region.

Culturally, Grand Rapids punches well above its weight. The city is home to nationally recognized institutions such as the Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, the Grand Rapids Art Museum, and the Grand Rapids Public Museum. Its vibrant downtown hosts ArtPrize, an internationally acclaimed public art competition that draws artists and visitors from around the world.

Add to that a lively food scene, professional and collegiate sports, and a celebrated craft brewing culture—earning Grand Rapids its “Beer City USA” reputation – and the result is a city with energy, creativity, and character.

Deeply rooted in history yet forward-looking in spirit, Grand Rapids offers a strong sense of civic pride and identity. From its legacy as the historic “Furniture City” to its role as the hometown of President Gerald R. Ford, the community blends tradition with innovation. With a growing metropolitan population, strong educational presence, and four-season lifestyle, Grand Rapids stands out as a place where professional opportunity and exceptional quality of life come together.

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

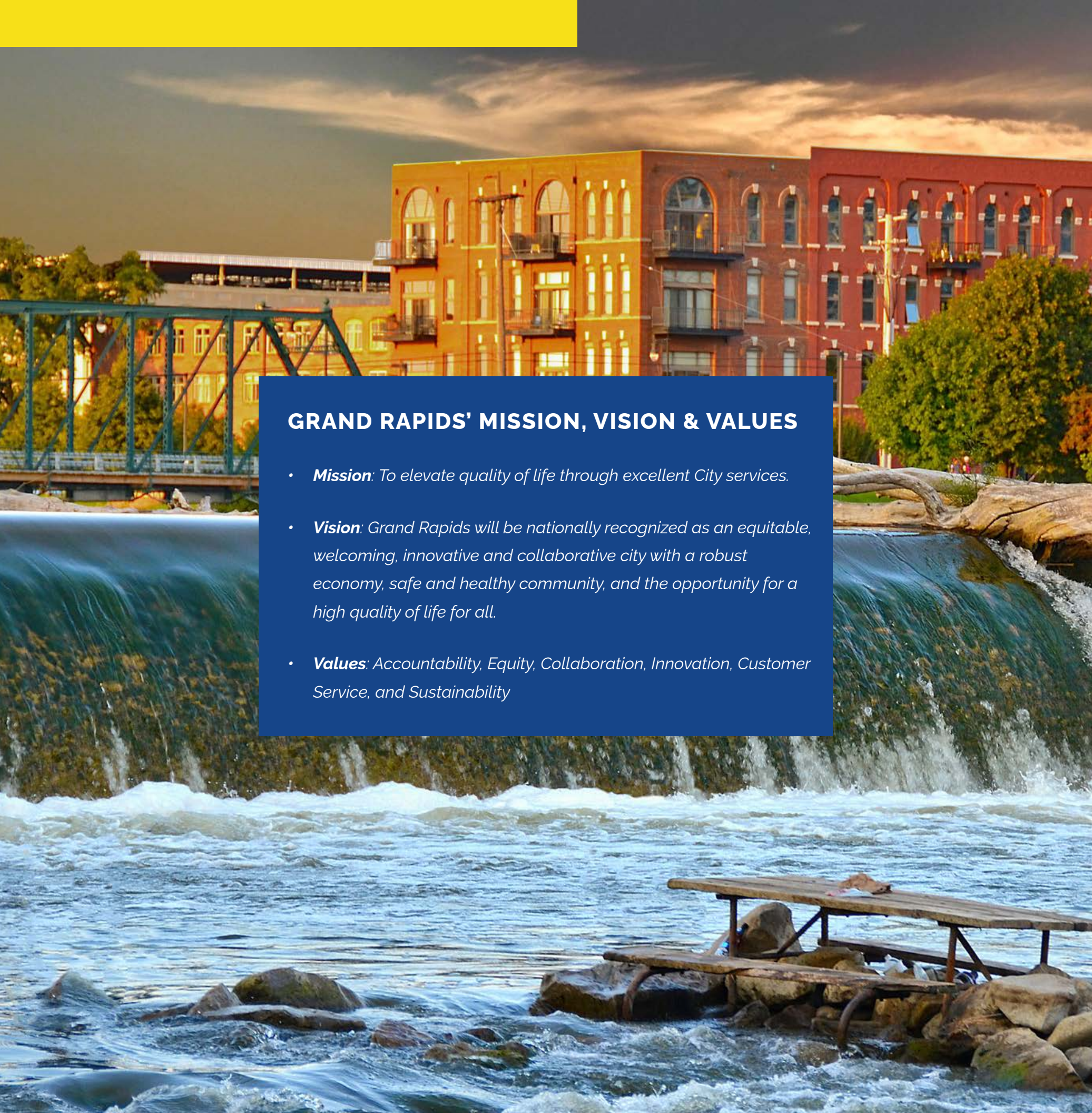
Population: 200,117
Median Household Income: \$65,526
Mean Travel Time to Work: 19 minutes
Persons 65+: 13%

RACE:
White: 61% Black: 18%
Two or more races: 13% Asian: 3%
All other races: 5%

ETHNICITY (MAY BE OF ANY RACE):
Hispanic or Latino: 16%

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#). Race and Hispanic origin are reported separately.





GRAND RAPIDS' MISSION, VISION & VALUES

- **Mission:** *To elevate quality of life through excellent City services.*
- **Vision:** *Grand Rapids will be nationally recognized as an equitable, welcoming, innovative and collaborative city with a robust economy, safe and healthy community, and the opportunity for a high quality of life for all.*
- **Values:** *Accountability, Equity, Collaboration, Innovation, Customer Service, and Sustainability*

City Government

The City of Grand Rapids is a home rule city and adopted a city charter in 1916 providing for the council-manager form of municipal government. The City Commission is composed of a Mayor and two Commissioners from each of three wards, for a total of seven Commissioners – each serving with a two-term limit. Each ward elects a Commissioner to a four-year term every two years, and the Mayor is elected at large. The Commission sets policy for the city, and is responsible for hiring the City Manager, City Attorney, City Clerk, and the City Treasurer.

The City of Grand Rapids is a complex and multifaceted organization with approximately 1,716 full-time equivalent positions and over 1,000 seasonal, part-time, and temporary employees. It serves 200,000 residents, 150,000 non-resident workers, 325,000 utility customers, and millions of annual visitors to Kent County. The City's FY 2026 budget totals \$735 million.

The City Attorney's Office

The City Attorney's Office performs legal services for the City and provides legal counsel to every aspect of Grand Rapids City government.

As required by the City Charter, the office represents the City in:

- Preparation and review of contracts and other legal documents
- Providing advice and opinions to the Mayor, City Commission, and all City departments
- Drafting ordinances and resolutions at the request of the Mayor or City Commissioners
- Prosecution of persons accused of violating City ordinances (parking and traffic tickets, housing violations, and criminal enforcement misdemeanors)
- Representation of the City and City officials in lawsuits

With 19 staff and an annual budget of \$3.75 million, the City Attorney's office is organized into three divisions:

Municipal Affairs Division: Provides legal advice and counsel to the Mayor, City Commissioners, City Manager and all departments, Boards and Commissions of the City.

Civil Litigation Division: Defends the City, its officers and employees in State and Federal lawsuits and administrative proceedings.

Enforcement Division: Prosecutes City Ordinance violations in Grand Rapids District and Kent County Juvenile Courts and also provides training and consultation to City Departments which enforce ordinances.

 **\$ 3.75M**
Operating Budget

 **19 FTE**
Employees





The Position

The City Attorney is appointed by the City Commission and serves at the will of the Commission as the City's chief legal officer. Reporting directly to the Commission, the City Attorney provides strategic legal counsel, oversees all legal affairs of the City, and ensures that municipal operations, policies, and actions are legally sound and defensible. Key Responsibilities Include:

- Serving as principal legal advisor to the City Commission, City Manager, and senior leadership
- Providing executive oversight and direction for all legal matters of the City
- Leading and managing the City's Law Department, including supervision of professional staff
- Representing the City in litigation before state and federal courts
- Preparing, reviewing, and approving ordinances, resolutions, contracts, and other legal instruments
- Issuing formal and informal legal opinions on complex and sensitive municipal matters
- Overseeing the use and performance of outside legal counsel retained by the City
- Advising on enforcement of laws, ordinances, and regulatory requirements
- Providing legal leadership related to taxation, bond issues, special assessments, and economic development initiatives
- Directing the preparation and administration of the Law Department budget
- Exercising independent professional judgment in politically complex and high-impact matters

The City Attorney is expected to be a highly experienced municipal law executive with the credibility to advise elected officials, the judgment to navigate politically sensitive issues, and the leadership capacity to manage a sophisticated public-sector legal function. Success in this role requires strategic thinking, decisiveness, and the ability to balance legal risk with practical governance outcomes.

Ideal Candidate

The City Commission seeks a principled, trusted legal advisor and organizational leader who brings sound judgment, managerial strength, and a deep commitment to the public interest. The ideal candidate will serve as both guardian of the City's legal integrity and a thoughtful partner to elected officials navigating complex and evolving issues.

- **Strong manager and leader of the City Attorney's Office:** First and foremost, an effective manager who can recruit, develop, and retain high-quality legal staff; set clear expectations; manage workloads; and ensure consistent, timely legal support across the organization. Values continuity, institutional knowledge, and keeping the organization on steady footing while strengthening internal operations.
- **Balanced counselor to a diverse and engaged City Commission:** A steady presence who can work effectively with strong personalities and differing viewpoints, helping the Commission find common ground while clearly explaining legal risks, options, and tradeoffs. Recognizes the Commission's role as policymaker, communicates proactively, and provides candid, trustworthy advice without drifting into policymaking.
- **Ethical, courageous, and resilient professional:** Known for integrity, wisdom, and a clear moral compass. Willing to engage in difficult conversations, operate confidently in legal gray areas, and litigate when necessary to defend City resources, residents' rights, and the public interest. Resilient under pressure, calm in conflict, and collaborative in approach.
- **Thought partner with curiosity and strategic perspective:** Brings intellectual curiosity, open-mindedness, and creativity to problem-solving. Comfortable exploring new ideas, modern interpretations of the law, and innovative approaches while maintaining legal rigor. Serves as a strategic thought partner to the Commission and senior leadership, helping anticipate issues rather than simply reacting to them.

- **Confident communicator and public-facing leader:** An effective and credible spokesperson who can explain complex legal matters clearly to elected officials, staff, and the public. Proactive, transparent, and collaborative in communication, with strong personal relationship skills and a reputation for being accessible, fair, and trustworthy.
- **Community-oriented and equity-aware:** Demonstrates empathy and a deep appreciation for Grand Rapids' diverse communities, including marginalized populations and the LGBTQ+ community. Background or interest in restorative practices, justice reform, decriminalization strategies, mediation, and de-escalation is valued, as is a commitment to fair, unbiased, and humane application of the law.
- **Trusted legal advisor grounded in law and local values:** Strong knowledge of municipal law is essential, with preference for candidates familiar with the legal, political, and cultural context of Michigan or the Upper Midwest. The ideal City Attorney understands and respects Grand Rapids' values, approaches issues objectively, and consistently prioritizes the best interests of the City over personal, political, or ideological considerations.



Qualifications

The following are the minimum qualifications for the position of City Attorney:

Education: Graduation from law school.

Experience: Ten years of experience as a practicing attorney, of which five years must be in municipal law work. Supervisory experience is required.

Bar Status: Must be admitted to practice in the Courts of the State of Michigan at time of appointment.





Salary & Benefits

The Grand Rapids City Commission will negotiate a highly competitive salary and executive benefits package with the selected candidate that is considerate of the candidate's experience and qualifications. The salary range for the City Attorney position is **\$195,862 to \$244,568**, depending on qualifications.

Retirement: The City offers a 401(a) retirement plan beginning at six months of employment. Employees contribute 6% of salary, with an employer contribution of 7%. Voluntary 457 Deferred Compensation and Roth IRA plans are also available. Additionally, after six months of employment, employees are enrolled in a Michigan Employee Retirement System (MERS) Healthcare Savings Account.

Insurance: Generous health, prescription, dental, and vision insurance benefits for employees and dependents, as well as a retiree health insurance plan are offered. Term life insurance with a face value of \$60,000 is offered to employee as well.

Section 125 Benefits: Employees can voluntarily enroll in Section 125 eligible benefits such as disability insurance, life insurance, cancer insurance, and flexible spending accounts (medical and dependent care reimbursement).

Vacation: The City provides a generous paid time off program

Relocation: Relocation assistance, if appropriate, will be negotiated with the selected candidate.

Tuition Reimbursement: The City reimburses for educational coursework with academic credit.

Allowances: Cell phone allowance or a provided cell phone and parking at City-owned parking facilities is also provided.

Health and Wellness: Annual Health and Wellness Incentive Program to earn up to \$250. Free health coaching/tobacco cessation programs and on-site and virtual workshops.

For additional information on the fringe benefits package offered to the City Attorney, click [here](#).

Application & Selection Process

Interested candidates are encouraged to apply no later than **Monday, February 23, 2026**. Submit a comprehensive résumé and compelling cover letter online at:

www.mosaicpublic.com/careers

CONFIDENTIAL INQUIRIES ARE WELCOMED TO:

Greg Nelson | greg@mosaicpublic.com | (916) 550-4100.

This recruitment incorporates existing rules and regulations that govern public sector recruitments in the State of Michigan. In accordance with public disclosure/open record laws, once candidates are recommended to the City Commission, information submitted for consideration may be made available to the public upon request by interested parties. Mosaic Public Partners will confirm candidates' continued interest prior to presentation to the City Commission.

The City of Grand Rapids is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

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