



# **CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING AGENDA**

**Wednesday, July 30, 2025  
4:00 PM**

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## ***MISSION STATEMENT***

*The Mission of the Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission is to promote a community of harmony and respect for the rights and dignity of all.*

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**CALL TO ORDER:** Pursuant to due notice and call thereof, the Human Rights Commission will hold a regular meeting on Wednesday, July 30th, 2025, at 4:00pm in City Hall Council Chambers at 420 North Pokegama Avenue, Grand Rapids, Minnesota.

**ROLL CALL:**

**PUBLIC INPUT** (if anyone wishes to address the Commission):

**SETTING THE AGENDA:** (This is an opportunity to approve the regular agenda as presented or add/delete an Agenda item by a majority vote of the Commission members present.)

**PRESENTATION:**

1. City Liaison, City Attorney Chad Sterle

**APPROVE MINUTES:**

- [2.](#) Approve June 25, 2025, Minutes

**FINANCIALS:**

- [3.](#) Approve Financials for July 2025

**BUSINESS:**

- [4.](#) Workplan

**UPDATES:**

- [5.](#) League of MN Cities-Braver Angels Workshop
6. League of MN Cities-Annual Conference
- [7.](#) Work Groups  
Community Needs Assessment WG: Commissioners Meittunen, Jackson, Blomquist & Council Representative MacGregor  
ADA Compliance WG: Commissioners Learmont and Erickson

Community Events WG: Commissioners Erickson, Jackson and Dokken  
City Staff/Volunteer Survey WG: Commissioners Erickson and Jackson

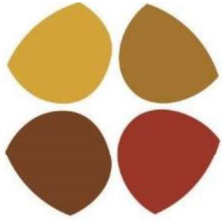
8. Community Engagement/Education

9. Current Events

CALLS/COMPLAINTS/INQUIRIES:

SET AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING:

ADJOURN:



# CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 25, 2025  
4:00 PM

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## MISSION STATEMENT

*The Mission of the Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission is to promote a community of harmony and respect for the rights and dignity of all.*

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CALL TO ORDER: Pursuant to due notice and call thereof, the Human Rights Commission will hold a regular meeting on Wednesday, June 25th, 2025, at 4:00pm in City Hall Council Chambers at 420 North Pokegama Avenue, Grand Rapids, Minnesota.

Commission Chair Angella Erickson called the meeting to order at 4pm.

### ROLL CALL:

#### PRESENT:

Commissioner Angella Erickson  
Commissioner Doug Learmont  
Commissioner Julee Jackson  
Commissioner Stephanie Meittunen  
Council Representative Molly MacGregor  
City Liaison, City Attorney Chad Sterle

#### ABSENT:

Commissioner Amy Blomquist  
Commissioner Ronald Grossman  
Commissioner Katelyn Dokken

PUBLIC INPUT (if anyone wishes to address the Commission):

None

SETTING THE AGENDA: (This is an opportunity to approve the regular agenda as presented or add/delete an Agenda item by a majority vote of the Commission members present.)

**Motion made by Council Representative MacGregor, Seconded by Commissioner Jackson to approve the agenda as written. Voting Yea: Commissioner Erickson, Commissioner Learmont, Commissioner Jackson, Commissioner Meittunen, Council Representative MacGregor.**

### PRESENTATION:

1. Itasca County HRA Executive Director Diane Larson

Itasca County Housing and Redevelopment Authority Executive Director Diane Larson gave a presentation regarding the Itasca County Housing Needs. Ms. Larson presented a slide show regarding the findings from the Comprehensive Housing Study Summary for Itasca County (handout to Commission) that they had done for them from September 2024. She talked about some of the findings, that showed groups that face the most barriers for housing were low income and mental illness. She also discussed the Fair Housing Act, the Human Rights Act and HUD, which all deal in some aspect with compliance, and the prosecution of landlords for discrimination across the county.

The Commission would like to get together with Ms. Larson in October to organize for the 2026 Fair Housing Month in April, with the Human Rights Commission to take the lead for a Proclamation.

#### APPROVE MINUTES:

2. Approve Minutes from May 28, 2025

**Motion made by Council Representative MacGregor, Seconded by Commissioner Jackson to approve the Minutes from May 28, 2025. Voting Yea: Commissioner Erickson, Commissioner Learmont, Commissioner Jackson, Commissioner Meittunen, Council Representative MacGregor**

#### FINANCIALS:

3. Approve June 30, 2025, Financials

City Liaison, City Attorney Chad Sterle said that they did not need to approve the financials. It was noted that the Pride pancake breakfast has not been taken out of the financials yet.

#### BUSINESS:

4. Workplan

Reviewed the Workplan as Quarter 2 is just about finished. The Community Needs Assessment Work group will continue to work on developing an event/panel presentation.

There is an upcoming event on August 5, 2025, that the Commission may want to attend at Gunn Park and will be hosted by Building Bridges that may fit into the Interfaith category on the Workplan. Council Representative Molly MacGregor will send information regarding a formal invite for the Commission.

#### UPDATES:

5. Juneteenth

There were approximately 30 people that participated in the Juneteenth Walk and Commissioner Erickson and Council Representative MacGregor attended.

6. Pride Event

The Pride Event went well and Commissioner Erickson estimated that they served approximately 150 people for the pancake breakfast. The heat was a factor for the lower turn out.

7. Mobility Mania-Accessibility for All Event

The Mobility Mania/Judy Garland Event, again the heat was a factor for the participants and they did not set the record for the dancing wheelchairs.

8. League of MN Cities-Braver Angels Workshop

Council Representative MacGregor would like to check into sponsoring a training of the Braver Angels workshop, possibly January or February next year.

9. League of MN Cities-Annual Conference

Council Representative MacGregor will attend this upcoming event and give a summary of her presentation at the Annual Conference to the Commission at the next meeting.

10. Work Groups

**Community Needs Assessment WG:** Commissioners Meittunen, Jackson, Blomquist & Council Representative MacGregor

**ADA Compliance WG:** Commissioners Learmont and Erickson

**Community Events WG:** Commissioners Erickson, Jackson and Dokken

**City Staff/Volunteer Survey WG:** Commissioners Erickson and Jackson

11. Community Education/Engagement

Discussed Community Education/Engagement and what the Commission could prioritize or would like to be doing.

12. Current Events

No discussion.

**CALLS/COMPLAINTS/INQUIRIES:**

Regarding last month's call, Commissioner Erickson sent them information not only how to contact the State of MN Human Rights to file a complaint, but at the State Department of Corrections as well.

Regarding the Pride Event, Staff Liaison, City Attorney Chad Sterle said that there were less conflicts than in 2024. The City Council and the Security were more prepared for this 2nd year of this event.

**SET AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING:**

**PRESENTATION:**

1. City Liaison, City Attorney Chad Sterle

**BUSINESS:**

4. Workplan

UPDATES:

5. League of MN Cities-Braver Angels Workshop
6. League of MN Cities-Annual Conference
7. Work Groups
8. Community Engagement/Education
9. Current Events

ADJOURN:

Commission Chair Erickson adjourned the meeting at 5:30pm.

Respectfully submitted by Cynthia Lyman

**CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

**SCHEDULE OF CHANGES IN REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES  
FOR THE PERIOD ENDING JUNE 30, 2025**

	<u>Actual 6/30/2025</u>
<b>Human Rights Budgeted Expenditures</b>	\$ 7,500
Name Plates	43
Judy Garland Festival Mobility Mania Sponsorship	500
Itasca Pride Festival Sponsorship	1,000
Juneteenth Freedom Walk/Picnic	500
Training	60
	<u>-</u>
<b>Grants Received</b>	-
<b>Balance Available</b>	<u><u>\$ 5,397</u></u>

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No Financial available for July, 30, 2025. Please subtract \$206.44 for the Pride Event which leaves a balance of \$5,190.56.



# Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission Calendar Year 2025 Work Plan

Prepared in accordance with Commission By-laws, Article 10

2025 QUARTER	GOAL OR ACTIVITY (refer to goal or activity description page for more detail)	ORDINANCE	ACTION TAKEN	EST. COST (See Notes)	ACTUAL
Q1 Jan – March  <i>Possible events/ recognitions: International Women’s Day – Black History Month -</i>	<b>Community Needs Work Group Established</b> - Work group will review relevant resources and data to recommend actions to the HRC around priority issues.	2-303 (b)(f)	<i>Commissioners Meittunen &amp; Blomquist, City staff Pierzina, and Councilor MacGregor</i>		
	<b>Indigenous People’s Day</b> - Work group to be established	2-303 ©	<i>Work group established to begin this and Juneteenth work</i>		
	<b>Review of Data:</b> - All Commissioners are asked to review the following resources: ○ <a href="#">ALICE – United Way</a> ▪ You can download the 2024 report from this , as well as view area specific details ○ HRA-PIT Report – <i>To be released</i> ○ MN Community Civil Rights – <i>To be released</i> ○ <a href="#">KOOTASCA</a> ○ <a href="#">Grand Itasca Community Health Needs Assessment Report</a>	2-303 (a)(b)(f)			
	<b>Quarter Total</b>				
Q2 April – June  <i>Possible events/ recognitions:</i>	<b>Story Stitch Event</b> - Connecting Community...			\$1,500	
	<b>Support Juneteenth Day Event</b> - Recognize <i>Freedom Day</i> , including human rights, civil rights, and freedom of discrimination in our community by assisting in public awareness and celebration events	2-303 ©	<i>Work group established to begin this and Juneteenth work</i>	\$500	



<i>Stomp the Stigma – Mental Health Awareness Month – Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month – LGBTQ+ Pride Month</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Banner request to city!</li> </ul>				
	<b>Support Pride Day Event/s Awareness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Look for opportunities to be involved in and/or support community events, outreach, or publication</li> </ul>	2-303 ©	Itasca Pride presented 3/26. Requested funds as well as volunteer hours for community engagement (Pancake bfast or other community meal service)	\$1,000	
	<b>Partner / Community Connection</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review opportunities to cooperate with other groups/governmental agencies concerned with Human Rights</li> </ul>	2-303 ©			
	<b>Housing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop a work group to review possible panel in November</li> <li>- Review / attend HRA event in March</li> </ul>	2-303 ©			
	<b>Onboarding</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Schedule training/speakers/presentations following updated terms and commissioners (March)</li> </ul>	Article 10 (1)		\$750	
	<b>Quarter Total</b>			<b>\$3,750</b>	
<b>Q3 July – Sept</b>  <i>Possible events/recognitions: ADA / Disability Pride month – Hispanic Heritage Month</i>	<b>Commissioner Survey</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop and deploy survey for the Human Rights Commissioners that could be offered to other City commissions and boards to better understand the diversity of City groups.</li> </ul>	Article 10 (1)(3); 2-301©; 2-303(b)(f)			
	<b>Interfaith Opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review and explore possible opportunities with various interfaith groups</li> </ul>	2-303 ©		\$750	
	<b>Indigenous People’s Day</b>	2-303 ©			
	<b>Quarter Total</b>			<b>\$750</b>	

Item 4.

<b>Q4 Oct – Dec</b>  <u>Possible events/recognitions:</u> (Nov) Native American Heritage Month – International Day of Persons with Disabilities – Human Rights Day	<b>Indigenous People’s Day</b> Cosponsor activities or publications to further human rights purposes with regard to indigenous people in the city - Don’t forget banner request to City!	2-303 ©		\$1,500	Item 4.
	<b>2026 Planning &amp; Budgeting</b> - Include presentation to city council				
	<b>Housing Panel</b> - Host or support panel on housing/homelessness in November	2-303 ©		\$1,500	
	<b>Quarter Total</b>			\$3,000	
	<b>2025 Commission Budget</b>	\$7,500			
	<b>Budgeted Expenditures</b>			\$7,500	
	<b>TOTAL ACTUAL EXPENDITURES</b>				

Notes:

- A. The time needed to organize and arrange the components for many activities will result in most listings involving more than one calendar quarter
- B. The estimated Cost column lists budgeted net cash costs to the City. It does not include contributions made to an activity by a collaborating partner nor an assumed value for donated time or resources by Human Rights commissioners, city administrative staff, or others.

## Summary Description of Goals and Activities

### **Commissioner Training and Education**

Actions or decisions by the Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission to provide freedom from discrimination requires knowledge about the types of prohibited discrimination and ways in which these types of discrimination may occur in employment, housing, real property, public accommodations, public services, education, and unfounded charges (City of Grand Rapids Rules, Division 6 Sec 2-301). The Commission plans to identify and act to identify and support commissioner training opportunities and activities throughout the year. This may include approaches such as outside speakers, presentation or event sponsorship, community meetings, interviews, identifying and sharing of pertinent new articles or reports, and/or in other ways. Commissioner training and education would be an ongoing objective and activity.

### **Support Juneteenth Day Event**

The Commission intends to recognize *Freedom Day*, June 19<sup>th</sup>, which includes recognizing freedoms in our nation and community including human rights, civil rights, and freedom of discrimination and creating public awareness of these rights through assisting street-side setting of street banners recognizing these freedoms, posting of United States flags, and co-issuing news media information.

### **Community Needs Assessment**

The Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission strives to identify human rights issues of greatest concern in the city, and to develop and implement activities to make improvements in the areas of greatest concern. Achieving this goal requires demographic data about the city population. To gather such data the Commission desires to identify data needs and data sources, analyze the data, and from the data analysis develop plans for Commission activities in the community or recommend city policies to address, mitigate or alleviate those human rights concerns or issues. The Commission intends to review 2020 census data to inform changes in priorities, activities, and recommendations in the city.

### **Review human rights educational opportunities with other groups\***

Schools in Grand Rapids contain their own sets of human rights concerns and opportunities. The Commission intends to explore and begin discussions with the schools in Grand Rapids to look into such possibilities as improving student experiences and understanding of diverse cultures possibly through programs such as pen pal programs with students in other countries, sponsoring an education Summit focused on human rights, or conducting a Human Rights Day event with local school. When an appropriate event is identified, the Commission expects to support such event.

### **Indigenous People's Day**

The Commission was an important factor in establishment of Indigenous People's Day in Grand Rapids and has continued as a key factor in conducting and sponsoring the annual event as part of creating cultural awareness in the local community. This role is planned to continue, including establishing a Human Rights Commission Indigenous People's Day committee to collaborate with other community groups to plan, identify a theme, organize, and conduct an Indigenous People's Day program and activities.

**Notes:**

During the year, adjustments may be made to reflect changes in costs, changes in priorities, changes in format or delivery methods, or identification of human rights concerns that were not identified in compiling the preceding list but which the Commission feels need to be addressed. Examples include:

- a. Possible adjustments could occur due to identifying new or incidental human rights concerns related to protected groups and areas from the [Minnesota Human Rights](#) and other state statutes and regulations:

<b>Protected Classes</b>	<b>Protected Area</b>
<b>RACE</b>	Employment, housing, public accommodations, public services, education, credit, and business
<b>COLOR</b>	Employment, housing, public accommodations, public services, education, credit, and business
<b>CREED</b>	Employment, housing, public accommodations, public services, education, and credit
<b>RELIGION</b>	Employment, housing, public accommodations, public services, education, and credit
<b>NATIONAL ORIGIN</b>	Employment, housing, public accommodations, public services, education, credit, and business
<b>SEX</b>	Employment, housing, public accommodations, public services, education, credit, and business
<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>	Employment, housing, public accommodations, education, and credit
<b>DISABILITY</b>	Employment, housing, public accommodations, public services, education, credit, and business
<b>PUBLIC ASSISTANCE</b>	Employment, housing, public services, education, credit
<b>AGE</b>	Employment and education
<b>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</b>	Employment, housing, public accommodations, public services, education, credit, and business
<b>FAMILIAL STATUS</b>	Employment, Housing
<b>LOCAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION ACTIVITY</b>	Employment

b. Adjustments could occur as a result of use of alternative education/training delivery methods such as print, seminars, webinars, speeches, and others

### **City of Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission Workplan Session – Notes**

Monday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024 from 5—6pm at City Hall Council Chambers

Attending: Angie, Doug, Ron, Julee, Katelyn, Rick, Chery, Cindy

Absent: Amy

This information was collected through reflection and dialogue, and then used to guide the initial planning of the 2025 Human Rights Commission Work Plan.

#### **What were successes/should we keep?**

- **Events**
  - Indigenous Peoples Day – student portion great, would have liked more community engagement
  - Juneteenth – need to increase participation
  - Pride event
    - Lots of community members wanting to be involved after that event, lots of community interest and great community participation
- **Marketing**
  - New banners!
- **Presentations & Training**
  - Outside organization presentations
    - Justin Page from MN Dept. Civil rights
    - GRPD Chief Morgan
  - Onboarding
    - Doing more – still need to do more

#### **What were our challenges or barriers?**

- **Community Engagement**
  - Lack of community participation
  - Students at MN North – concerns of safety and feeling welcome in community
- **Commissioner Expectations**
  - Planning too late
  - Time & other time commitments
  - Participation of commissioners
    - Are expectations clear for work groups, showing up, volunteering equally?

- Lack of quorum
  - Subject matter – staying on task?
- **Missing – mission-focused work**
  - Lot of time in meetings spent on marketing and business (though necessary) also takes away from discussion around issues in community
    - *Briefly discussed looking at other rules to run meetings (i.e. get rid of Roberts Rules)*
  - Should have done more with Pride (larger sponsorship, actively volunteer, etc.)
- **Others**
  - Seek opportunities for funding
  - Systemic structures
    - Sexism, racism, ableism, etc.

#### What else could we be doing

- **Presentations & Data** – Continue having speakers come to the Commission; Do more with data collection in a variety of capacities.
  - Work with GRPD and Chief Morgan
    - 2024 Bias report
    - *Other reports / opportunities to partner*
  - Protected Classes
    - Scanning and ensuring we are hitting on all and finding opportunities to support wide range
    - Better statistics on understanding our community, diversity, and the needs
  - More guest speakers
    - Community partners
    - school personnel
    - others
  - 2-303. F – *data collection on low-income concentrations within the city and send recommendations to planning commission and council*
  - Reports to utilize or seek out re: data
    - MN Community Civil Rights Needs Report – *To be released February 2025*
    - ALICE
    - HRA – PIT report
    - KOOTASCA
- **Events**
  - More events for Juneteenth
  - Education to the public on protected classes
  - Increase event participation through advertising
    - Use of radio, newspaper, etc.
- **Partners**
  - Find a group to partner with like the blankets for homeless etc. of food bank
  - Partner with other city departments / commissions
- **Policy**

- Policy recommendations / engaging with City Council
- Voting protections
- **Others**
  - Seek additional funding
  - Do what we can to make GR more welcoming (ex. bring back “all are welcome” materials)
  - Combat misinformation – *what is our role or how can we support*
  - Discussion and/or actions on national/international human rights situations
  - Plan for the future to find ways to engage the next generation to take our places in future

#### **WHAT and WHO is missing?**

- **Housing / Homelessness**
- **Mental Health**
  - Community-based options for MH crisis (instead of police response)
- **Partner/Community Connections**
  - Opportunities to bring in students for planning / volunteering?
  - More interaction with other community stakeholders (schools, religious, social organizations, etc.)
  - Opportunities for connection in faith and nonfaith communities
  - Big View – how to help support and create a wider reach
- **DEI/IDEA + Recruitment**
  - Need to recruit more commissioners generally
    - *Unaware of the diversity of current commission make up – opportunity here to learn more*
    - Government Academy
      - Opportunities to help push visibility in different groups of people outside of facebook and newspaper
    - Other ways to recruit and engage?
  - Diverse population – ensuring representation and activities
  - Indigenous / Native American distrust of GR (city, policies, groups)
- **Others**
  - Accountability framework for City – ensuring actions by City (policies, regulations, projects, etc.) are viewed through a human rights lens
  - Immigration & Welcoming Communities
    - What opportunities are available here?



## **Managing Difficult Conversations with Constituents**

A Braver Angels Workshop for Elected Officials

### ***Participant Guide***

#### **Part 1: Opening Principles**

##### **Workshop Goals**

1. That you can show people who disagree with you that they have been heard.
2. That you can find areas of commonality or agreement when those are present.
3. That you can share your views in a way that is likely to be heard by the other person.

##### **Agenda**

- Introductions
- Ground rules
- Expectations to abandon
- Principle
- Skills

##### **Ground Rules**

1. We're here to talk about skills, not policies. So, let's not get into policy debates.
2. Let's help each other out as we work on the skills. It's not a competition.



3 Expectations to Abandon	Instead
You will persuade the other person they are wrong and you are right.	Hope they will see you as reasonable or at least willing to listen.
The other person will use the skills taught in this workshop.	Expect that you will have to do the heavier lifting.
These skills will work with large groups of people whose leaders are prepared to shut down real conversation.	These skills are for one-to-one and small group conversations with people who are at least willing to hear your viewpoints.

### **The Prime Directive: Connect First, then Explain Your View**

- Disagreements generally go this way: You say up, I say down. You say left, I say right. **This costs too much. No, it doesn't.** The result is impasse or escalation.
- Instead say some version of "I hear you on...." If I get what you're concerned about, it's.... Do I have that right?
- When people feel heard, their negativity usually decreases.

### **Part 2: Four Skills: AAA-P (Acknowledge, Appreciate, Agree, and Perspective)**

#### **Acknowledge**

**Acknowledge the other person's view and the strength of their feelings about the issue.**

"I hear you on...." "You come down on wanting the school board to ...." "I get that this is really important to you." A brief paraphrase of the person's view goes a long way for them to feel heard. Use a neutral tone of voice and avoid pat phrases such as "I understand" that don't show you've heard them.

*Examples: "I hear you that government mandates are not the way to go" or "This new zoning ordinance is really bothering you." "If I understand what you're concerned about, it's the noise level plus the expense of the project."*

It's important to pause after acknowledging rather than immediately give your own perspective.

The other person usually repeats or adds to their initial statement. Sometimes you didn't capture what they were saying, and they clarify. Listen and acknowledge again, then move on to the next skills.

**PROMPT #1**

I think you are ignoring the crime problem that's rising in this community and scaring a lot of us. All I hear is Defund the Police or anti-law enforcement rhetoric. Of course there are some bad apples in law enforcement, but by and large officers are doing a good job. And it's demoralizing for them to hear that our elected officials don't support them. The public safety budget is coming up for a vote, and I hope you will do the right thing by expanding the law enforcement presence. I know our deputies and officers can't solve every problem, but they are our first line of defense and deserve our full support.

**PROMPT #2**

You seem to think that throwing more money into policing is going to solve the crime problem. Crime comes from poverty and discrimination, and it has to be solved by addressing those problems. Communities of color in particular don't trust law enforcement, and for good reason. One of the public safety bills under consideration will move funds away from law enforcement and into things like social workers responding to mental health 911 calls rather than armed officers showing up. And that bill will fund community agencies that can get at root causes of crime. I urge you to stop over-emphasizing policing and have a broader view of how to promote public safety.

**Appreciate**

**Affirm the person for bringing their concern to you.**

"I appreciate you for telling me what's on your mind about this issue."

"What you're saying is important for me to hear."

Of course, this must be real for you at the moment, or the person will sense it's fake. Appreciate later in the conversation if you can't muster it right away.

**Agree (find something to agree with, if at all possible)**

Listen not just for what you disagree with or how the other person is wrong, but for what you agree about, even if it's just a very small part of what the other person has said.

If nothing else, you might recognize a common value, aspiration, or concern.

*Examples: "I agree with you that cost over runs are a real risk on projects like this one." "I'm with you that the health and safety of our kids has to come first."*

*"I agree that we have to be careful to not ask government to do what the private sector can do better" or "I agree with you that sometimes the government is the only way to handle a social safety net problem that personal charity can't cope with."*

**Practice Agree Skill**

**Perspective**

Now you are ready to share your views. Here are the key Perspective skills.

Element	Examples
I Statements	<p>"This is how I see it"</p> <p>"This is why I see it this way."</p> <p>As opposed to "This is how it absolutely is."</p>
Name your sources	<p>"I'm basing this on the Attorney General's report on the current crime rate. I understand that you're seeing something different where you live."</p> <p>"I've been meeting with members in the community to get their perspectives."</p>
Try to incorporate a concern, value or belief the other person shared.	<p>"I think we both want a safe community."</p> <p>"It sounds like we both believe in parent involvement in their children's education."</p>
Avoid jargon with constituents	<p>"That's a CDC mandate."</p> <p>"Robert's Rules of Order" doesn't allow it."</p>
Avoid negative labels	<p>"That's racist/socialist."</p>

**Practice Perspective Skills**

**Closure**

Say what, if anything, you will do with what you have heard. You might:

- promise to think about it some more
- pass on the concern/complaint to someone for review/handling
- follow up on a source of information the other person shared
- shift how you talk about the issue in the future
- share that your view has shifted in some way

## **Managing Verbal Attacks**

### **Principles:**

1. Don't be either a victim or a counter-attacker.
2. Don't stoop to defending your character or integrity.
3. Stay calm and firm.

### **Exit Skills:**

1. Soft exit: "This conversation is no longer constructive, so I'm going to move on."
2. Medium exit: "What you just said crossed the line into personal attack. If you want to stick with the issue you're concerned about, I can continue. Otherwise, let's stop."
3. Hard exit: "I am not going to stay in a conversation where my integrity is questioned, so we're finished."

The other person will almost always say something in reply. If it's anything other than an apology and a promise to dial back, then just repeat that you are done with the conversation and walk away/hang up/log off. Be careful not to keep engaging once you've said you are finished.

### **Part 3: Demonstration**

#### **Community Issue: Donated Land for Dog Park**

A long-time, respected member of the community who was an animal lover willed a piece of land to the community with the specific intent of building a dog park. The County has been wanting to find land to do this for some time but had been unsuccessful, so the unexpected donation seemed like a godsend. However, once plans were announced the unforeseen issues started to emerge. The land is proximate (NOT abutting) to a playground and parents soon started complaining that among other things, the potential for loose dogs attacking their children was real, that the dog park would not be well-maintained, and their children would continually be exposed to noxious odors. The County does not want to give up the donation of land and promises that the park will be well-regulated. Here's a conversation where the elected official uses the Braver Angels skills with an upset parent. They know each other slightly.

**Constituent:** "The County is talking about building a dog park right by the playground my kid uses. This is insane! My Jimmy is already scared to death of dogs. He won't want to go near a playground with dogs yipping and yapping and leaving their poop behind!"

**Official:** "I hear you. You're worried about the dogs scaring your son and leaving dog messes near the playground."

**Constituent:** "Right. People unleash their dogs in dog parks, and some of those dogs could jump the fence."

**Official:** "I can understand your concern about safety, and I'm glad you brought it up to me."

**Constituent:** "We elected you to protect our community."

**Official:** "I agree that if we go ahead with the dog park, it has to be safe for children and adults, and sanitary as well."

**Constituent:** "Yes, but I don't think the county leaders are taking this seriously."

**Official:** "I understand your concern about not being listened to, and I'd like to share what I know about the situation. As you probably know, one of our long-term residents donated this parcel of land to the county in his will specifically for a dog park. That's the only thing we can use it for, according to his will. A lot of communities have dog parks now and it's a great way to help people connect with their neighbors. We've been looking for a location for one for a good while now. I. A lot of other counties have them, and people here have been wanting one for a long time. Yes, it's not ideal that the land is right by a playground, for all the reasons you just mentioned. However, I believe we can find workarounds suitable for everyone. Maybe higher fencing that dogs can't jump over would help. Or maybe we could put a basketball court next to it as a buffer to separate it from the younger kids' play equipment. We are looking to set up a group of citizens to help find solutions that will work for dog lovers and people in the neighborhood. Might you be interested in talking with that group, and maybe even being part of the group?"

**Constituent:** "Well, I'll think about it. I might be interested."

**Official:** "Great. Please give me your contact information and someone will be back in touch."

**Constituent:** "Okay, thanks for listening, but I'm going to keep track of this!"

**Official:** "I'm sure you will."

## 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