



CITY OF NOVI
Administrative ePacket
August 01, 2024

Public Safety (Police/Fire)

Infrastructure (Roads/Water/Sewer)

Economic Development (City Revenue/Job Growth)

[City West Update, Consideration of Zoning Map Amendment for south side of Grand River - McBeth](#)

Citizen-Focused Government (Shared Services/Customer Services)

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[GFL to Priority Waste Transition Update - Oppermann](#)

[Paul Whelan Released from Russian Prison](#)

Natural Areas & Features and Community Character (Community that Preserves)

Fiscally Responsible Government (Maintain)

Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services (Enhance Services)

Capital Improvement Program

City Council Only or Confidential

MEMORANDUM



TO: VICTOR CARDENAS, CITY MANAGER
FROM: BARBARA MCBETH, AICP, CITY PLANNER
SUBJECT: CITY WEST REZONING – SOUTH SIDE OF GRAND R
DATE: AUGUST 1, 2024

Mayor and Council –
FYI on correspondence
to be sent (I believe
next week) to residents
/property owners
effected by the
proposed City West
South rezoning effort.
- Victor

This memo and attachment provide an update to the June 21, 2024 memo on this topic. Updates to the anticipated steps for consideration are provided at the bottom of this page.

On May 20, 2024, the City Council approved the Second Reading of the CW, City West Zoning Ordinance, and approved the City-initiated rezoning for most of the properties along the north side of Grand River Avenue between Beck and Taft Roads. The City Council made the following motion, that carried 7-0:

Approval of Zoning Map Amendment 18.741 to rezone **only the north side of Grand River Avenue between Beck Road and Taft Road, consisting of approximately 137 acres of land**, from I-1 Light Industrial, and OST Office Service Technology to CW City West District. This motion is made because the proposed City West Rezoning fulfills the concepts provided in the Master Plan for Land Use to provide a new zoning district that will create a vibrant, integrated, mixed-use arts and entertainment district along Grand River Avenue, east of Beck Road, and that would support and enhance the nearby Suburban Collection Showplace and Ascension Providence Park. **SECOND READING**

At the May 20 meeting, an alternate motion was provided in the motion sheet that would have rezoned both the north and south sides of Grand River Avenue to the new City West District. The south side of Grand River Avenue consists of another 110 acres +/- of land. The City Council chose the first recommended action above, based on discussion that took place during prior meetings.

Following a request from Mayor Fischer, staff has been asked to provide the steps needed for the possible reconsideration for rezoning the south side of Grand River Avenue. The City West Zoning Ordinance text and Design Guide would not need to be amended; the Council's approval of the CW ordinance left open the possibility that the south side of Grand River could be rezoned at some time in the future. Additionally, the rezoning signs are still in place along the south side of Grand River Avenue. It is assumed that the southeast corner of Grand River Avenue and Beck Road would be excluded from the request, as the property owner had previously requested that the existing B-3, General Business and RA, Residential Acreage zoning be maintained.

The following steps are being taken for new consideration of rezoning property on the south side of Grand River:

1. The Planning Commission would consider the new request and would be asked to "set" a public hearing for an upcoming meeting. **This step was completed at the July 24th Planning Commission meeting.**
2. Staff would notify the affected property owners of the new City-initiated rezoning along the south side of Grand River Avenue and seek feedback. **The attached letter provides that notice and will be sent out the week of August 6th.**
3. Staff would send out public hearing notices and provide notice in the newspaper. **It is anticipated that notices will be sent out near the end of August, for a public hearing at the September 25th Planning Commission meeting, or the first meeting in October.**
4. The Planning Commission would hold the public hearing and provide a recommendation to the City Council on the Zoning Map Amendment.
5. The City Council would consider the Zoning Map Amendment at two readings, followed by publication of the Zoning Map amendment, if it is approved.

Once approved, property owners or applicants would be able to submit site plans for consideration under the terms of the CW ordinance.

Att. Letter to property owners in the proposed CW South District.



August 6, 2024

Dear City of Novi property owner or current tenant,

City of Novi staff have been working on drafting an ordinance to establish a new zoning district that is intended to create a higher-density, pedestrian-oriented area with a mix of uses including residential, office, retail, and commercial. The City West District will lie north and south of Grand River Avenue and stretch from Beck to Taft, with a few exclusions. Please consult the included map for reference of the new district.

On May 20, 2024, the City Council adopted new ordinance language for both the north and south sides of Grand River Avenue, and rezoned the north side of Grand River to City West. The City Council left open the option to potentially rezone the south side of Grand River Avenue at a later date. At the request of Mayor Fischer, Planning Department staff is now bringing back for new consideration the rezoning of most of the south side of Grand River to the City West District,

The adopted ordinance text includes two sections, the first of which establishes the district and underlying requirements for all buildings and uses. The second section establishes the Mixed-Use Development Option, meant to incentivize mixed-use development by offering greater height, density, and more permitted uses, as well as greater flexibility in development standards. Please visit www.cityofnovi.org/services/community-development and scroll to the What's Trending section to view the adopted City West ordinance text and accompanying Design Guide.

Modifications from prior draft ordinance

Some modifications of the ordinance for the south side of Grand River since the February 2023 letter was sent to property owners and renters, include the following:

- Limitation on building height and additional building and parking setback where property abuts residential
- Additional emphasis on preserving natural features

Most of the modifications were made due to concerns heard at the public hearing from nearby residents, or by concerns raised by the Planning Commission and City Council during the review in 2023 and 2024.

Comments requested

You are receiving this letter because you own or rent property in this proposed district and your opinion on the future of this area in the city is vitally important. It is the hope of city staff that property owners in this proposed district can take the time to review both the ordinance text and the Design Guide to understand the district that the city is envisioning for City West. We hope to get as many comments as possible before a public

CITY COUNCIL

Mayor

Justin Fischer

Mayor Pro Tem

Laura Marie Casey

David Staudt

Brian Smith

Ericka Thomas

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cityofnovi.org

hearing is scheduled for consideration by the Planning Commission for a recommendation to the City Council.

Please email comments to Lindsay Bell at lbell@cityofnovi.org or call the Community Development Department at [248.347.0475](tel:248.347.0475) if you have any further questions or would like to set up a meeting with staff.

Thank you,
Barbara McBeth, AICP
City Planner



A “tune-up” of our organizational vision and values

Mayor and Council –

The following presentation was presented to the City’s Leadership team this week. The goal for re-tooling our internal organizational values is to reaffirm and clarify previous efforts in combination with the organization’s Leadership Philosophy. Again, this is completely internal facing. Our plan is to roll this out to all employees in mid-September

- Victor

WHY THE TUNE-UP?

- By re-tuning our organizational vision and values, we not only honor our past commitments but also pave the way for a future defined by leadership at all levels, responsive governance, and a thriving, inclusive community.
- This tune-up is a pivotal step in ensuring our vision and values are not only aspirational but actionable, guiding us towards a brighter and more dynamic future for the City of Novi.
- New “crew:” New leadership in the City Manager and Assistant City Manager creates an opportunity to chart a new course.
- Time – when was the last tune-up?

FORMER VISION

The City of Novi is committed to excellence in customer service. We will provide knowledgeable, courteous, and efficient service to those we are privileged to serve. We will strive to deliver quality customer service through continuous improvement.



TUNED-UP VISION

The City of Novi aims to lead in innovation, excellence, and outstanding service through a culture of trust, respect and continuous improvement.

Current Values

The City of Novi employees are committed to providing quality services and take pride in contributing to the community. Our team members are motivated by fair and positive recognition and possess a sense of value to deliver quality customer service. We proudly provide essential community services through planning, goal setting, engagement and prioritization that are supported by City Council and delivered transparently. We proudly provide essential community services through planning, goal setting, engagement and prioritization that are supported by City Council and delivered transparently. We pride ourselves on communicating openly and honestly through a variety of methods and encourage internal and external feedback which is accurate and timely to most effectively inform all organization members. We believe and take pride in Novi's tradition of partnering with the wider community. We desire to be the first to step up and partner, to be leaders who follow through on mutually beneficial co-operations. With the assistance of school service agencies, and other units of government, we can find areas of each of our strengths to provide the best and most efficient service to citizens and businesses.



TUNED-UP VALUES

TEAM

COMMITMENT

INNOVATION

TRUST



TUNED-UP VALUES

TEAM

TEAM

**We work together
to achieve
collective success**

Being a TEAM is central to our organization. We value diversity, inclusivity, and respect for everyone's contributions. By recognizing each member's unique skills and perspectives, we foster a culture of collaboration, trust and mutual respect, encouraging everyone to do their best and feel a sense of belonging.



TUNED-UP VALUES

COMMITMENT

COMMITMENT

**We are dedicated
and passionate
about delivering
the highest quality
of service**

COMMITMENT is key to our culture. We focus on collaboration, innovation, and being forward-thinking. We encourage creativity, adaptability, and resilience to achieve our goals. With a positive mindset, we explore options and overcome obstacles, fostering optimism, determination, and a can-do attitude for our success and growth



TUNED-UP VALUES

INNOVATION

INNOVATION

We are driven by a relentless curiosity to explore new possibilities

INNOVATION is at our core. We embrace new ideas and technologies to tackle challenges and improve services. Through collaboration and continuous improvement, we find efficient solutions to meet our community's needs. We value experimentation, risk-taking, and learning from successes and failures to drive positive change and enhance residents' quality of life.



TUNED-UP VALUES

TRUST

TRUST

**We are transparent,
clear, and involve
citizens in our
community**

TRUST reflects our commitment to transparency with the public about policies, actions, and outcomes. We build trust by ensuring citizens understand government operations, decision-making, and use of taxpayer resources. By encouraging public participation, we give citizens the chance to hold the government accountable and actively engage in democracy.

EXISTING RESOURCES



City of Novi Leadership Philosophy: Our Guide to Manage, Recruit/Select, and Follow

We believe employees are **committed to providing exceptional services and take pride in contributing** to the community. Our team members are motivated by fair and positive recognition and possess a sense of value to deliver quality customer service.

We believe **diversity is one of our strengths**. We come from many backgrounds and experiences and, together, have built an open, inclusive and welcoming environment. We ensure each person is treated with the highest level of dignity and respect.

We encourage an **inclusive, trusting, and supportive environment** that fosters innovative problem-solving initiatives from every aspect of the organization.

We believe in exercising **leadership at all levels**. We believe the opportunity to lead, both formally and informally, is available and encouraged throughout the organization.

We believe **team members closest to situations have the greatest potential for quickly and effectively resolving issues** and decisions can and should be made by all people throughout the organization.

We are **committed to community engagement, responsible stewardship** of the resources entrusted to us, and delivering services in an open and transparent manner.

We **encourage and expect team members to dedicate and commit time to future thinking and planning, as well as exploring innovative options** to do things better. We understand that we may fail, but we will learn from those experiences.

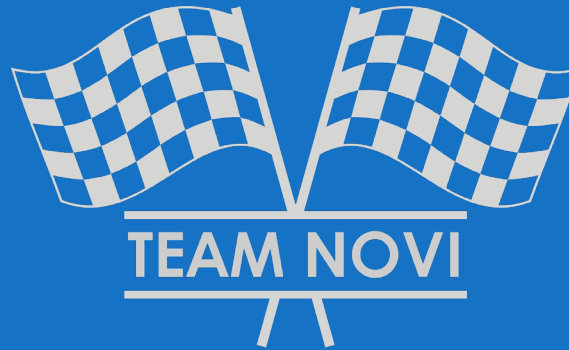
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We **believe and take pride in Novi's tradition of leading and partnering with the wider community**. We desire to be the first to step up and partner, to be leaders who follow through on mutually beneficial co-operations. With the assistance of schools, service agencies, and other units of government, we can find areas of each of our strengths to provide the best and most efficient service to citizens and businesses.

Revised: 11/11/2021



cityofnovi.org



***“ Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world;
indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has. ”***

Margaret Mead

MEMORANDUM



TO: VICTOR CARDENAS, CITY MANAGER
FROM: KATHERINE OPPERMAN, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT
SUBJECT: GFL TO PRIORITY WASTE TRANSITION UPDATE
DATE: AUGUST 1, 2024

There continues to be a higher than normal number of missed collections of all types, including several instances of whole streets or subdivisions being collected a day late. That said, following the discovery of an email error at Priority Waste, communication and follow-up from Priority Waste to City staff has been significantly improved. In most cases they respond and address issues within 24 hours of the reported complaint.

Unfortunately, this increased communicativeness does not yet appear to extend to Priority Waste's general phone line or webchat help box for City of Novi residents. Those who attempt to reach out to Priority Waste prior to the City have continued to report long call wait times or no response at all.

The following are the statistics of City communications with residents regarding Priority Waste service for July 2024 (*please note that these statistics represent calls/reports from individual residents, not the actual number of households affected*):



All Missed Pick-Ups
113



Missed Garbage Pick-Ups
43



Missed Recycling Pick-Ups
29



Missed Yard Waste Pick-Ups
41

Paul Whelan released from Russia in prisoner swap that includes reporter Evan Gershkovich



Kristen Jordan Shamus

Detroit Free Press

Paul Whelan, the Michigan man who has been held prisoner in Russia for five years, seven months, one week and a day on false charges of espionage, was freed Thursday in a deal that included Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, who also was wrongfully detained on spying charges the U.S. government says he didn't commit, along with journalist Alsu Kurmasheva, and dissident Vladimir Kara-Murza.

Russia released the three Americans and one green-card holder as part of a major prisoner swap with the U.S., the White House said Thursday.

"The deal that secured their freedom was a feat of diplomacy," President Joe Biden said in a statement. "All told, we've negotiated the release of 16 people from Russia — including five Germans and seven Russian citizens who were political prisoners in their own country. Some of these women and men have been unjustly held for years. All have endured unimaginable suffering and uncertainty. Today, their agony is over."



U.S. allies, which include Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Norway, and Turkey, helped broker the deal, Biden said.

"This is a powerful example of why it's vital to have friends in this world whom you can trust and depend upon. Our alliances make Americans safer," he said.

Later, speaking to the press with Whelan's sister, Elizabeth Whelan, standing next to him, Biden said, "Their brutal ordeal is over and they're free." And one point, he reached over and took Elizabeth Whelan's hand, saying of the prisoners' families, "I can't imagine what they've been through."

Mayor and Council –

News broke today that former Novi resident Paul Whelan had been released from captivity in Russia. Mr. Whelan lived in an apartment here in Novi. Chief Zinser and I have been in contact with our federal representatives to determine where he will be returning to after landing at Andrews Airforce Base later today.

- Victor

Biden brought the families to Oval Office to speak to their loved ones by phone just after the swap in Turkey in what National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan described as an "overjoyed" atmosphere. Sullivan, who also became emotional while describing the historic swap, called the diplomatic effort "vintage" Biden and noted that the president made a call to the prime minister of Slovenia to finalize arrangements on Sunday, July 21 – a short time before the president announced [he was stepping aside as the Democratic Party's presidential nominee](#) this year, in favor of Vice President Kamala Harris.

Biden and Harris were expected to greet Whelan, Gershkovich and Kurmasheva at Andrews Air Force Base late Thursday night.

Bloomberg News reported the three American citizens and one green-card holder traveled by plane out of Russia early Thursday. The U.S. and its allies will return prisoners to Russia that they hold under the deal, sources said, asking for anonymity to discuss matters that aren't yet public.

"Today, we celebrate the return of Paul, Evan, Alsu, and Vladimir and rejoice with their families," Biden said. "We remember all those still wrongfully detained or held hostage around the world. And reaffirm our pledge to their families: We see you. We are with you. And we will never stop working to bring your loved ones home where they belong."

Whelan's twin brother, David, asked for privacy in the days and weeks ahead, as Paul Whelan and the other Americans adjust to life back in the United States.

"This is now Paul's story to tell and I'm sure he will, in time, communicate how he wants to tell it," [David Whelan said in a statement](#). "It is vital that he be given agency over his life again, something the Kremlin took away for so many years. I do not represent him.

"Every story has an ending and this is the end of the story of our family's advocacy for Paul."

It's been a long time coming, U.S. Rep. Haley Stevens, D-Birmingham, said in a tweet posted to the social media platform X.

"Paul, after more than five years, we finally get to say, welcome home," Stevens wrote. "You lost your job, your home, and your dog, but you never lost your faith, and we never lost our faith in you. Your family have been tireless advocates and we cannot wait to see you finally reunited. ... Justice has prevailed and today, an innocent man is free."



Kara-Murza, 42, is an activist and dissident with dual Russian-British citizenship who has been a persistent campaigner against President Vladimir Putin's rule and was given a record 25-year prison sentence in April last year on treason and other charges for criticizing Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Kurmasheva is a [journalist](#) with Radio Free Europe and RL's Tatar-Bashkir Service who was arrested in October 2023 in Kazan, Russia and accused of failing to register as a foreign agent. She was convicted earlier this month in a secret trial of "spreading false information" and sentenced to six and a half years in prison, according to Radio Free Europe.

The prisoner swap involves the release of 16 individuals previously detained in Russia in exchange for eight individuals held in the U.S., Germany, Norway, Slovenia and Poland.

U.S. Rep. Elissa Slotkin, D-Holly, released a statement that said, in part: "Today's happy news is also a reminder that we face a dangerous and unprincipled adversary in Vladimir Putin. He uses innocent Americans as pawns. Those who want to cozy up to him, or simply turn a blind eye to his demands in Ukraine, would do well to remember the suffering of Paul, the Whelan family, and the millions of Ukrainians living with the consequences of Putin's actions."

What led to Paul Whelan's arrest

Whelan, 54, lived in Novi before he was arrested Dec. 28, 2018, in his room at Moscow's upscale Metropol Hotel.

The Russian Foreign Ministry alleged that Whelan was caught in an act of espionage with a USB drive that contained classified information. Whelan insisted he was set up, and simply was a tourist in Moscow to attend the wedding of a friend.

"Russia says it caught James Bond on a spy mission. In reality, they abducted Mr. Bean on holiday," Whelan told journalists during a detention hearing at Moscow City Court in October 2019.

For more than a year, Whelan awaited trial at Lefortovo prison in Moscow, notorious for its poor conditions. Initially, he was denied such staples as toilet paper and soap. He said guards threatened, abused, and harassed him.

He also wasn't allowed to make calls home to his parents, Edward and Rosemary Whelan, who live in Manchester, Michigan. His mail was censored, and visits from his lawyers and embassy representatives were extremely limited.

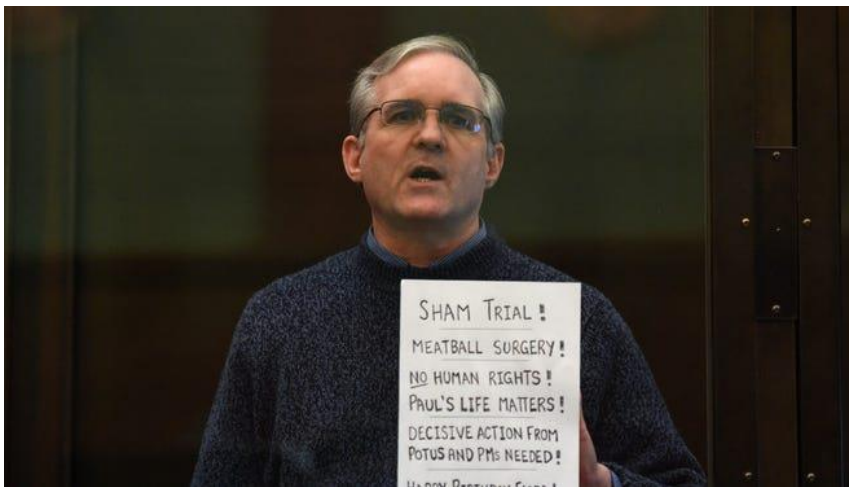
"This is typical prisoner-of-war isolation technique," Whelan told journalists at a court hearing in May 2019. "They're trying to run me down so that I will talk to them."



His health suffered. He lost weight. An inguinal hernia that was a nuisance before his trip to Russia became a pressing concern. An ambulance was called during one of Whelan's court hearings, and he underwent emergency hernia repair surgery in May 2020.

When his trial finally came a month later, proceedings took place behind closed doors. Whelan, who is a former Marine and worked as head of global security for auto supplier BorgWarner, was swiftly convicted.

John Sullivan, then-U.S. ambassador in Moscow, described the conviction a "mockery of justice."



'A crime has been committed against him'

"Paul was given a horrific sentence of 16 years for a crime he did not commit," his sister, Elizabeth Whelan, told the UN Security Council in late April 2023.

Whelan was taken to IK-17, a labor camp in the Russian province of Mordovia, about an eight-hour drive southeast of Moscow. For nearly three years, he has spent most of his days in the camp sewing buttonholes and cutting threads from prison uniforms, "held as a pawn and victim of Russia's descent into lawlessness," Elizabeth Whelan said.

"Paul has not committed a crime, but a crime has been committed against him."

And Whelan has watched, painfully, as other Americans arrested in Russia during his years of incarceration won their freedom.

First was Trevor Reed, a former Marine arrested in August 2019 — eight months after Whelan. Reed was accused of assaulting a police officer after a night of heavy drinking in Moscow. He was released in April 2022 [during a prisoner swap](#) with the U.S. government, which was holding convicted Russian drug trafficker Konstantin Yaroshenko.

When Reed was freed but Whelan was left behind, his brother David Whelan said: “Is President (Joe) Biden's failure to bring Paul home an admission that some cases are too hard to solve? Is the administration's piecemeal approach picking low-hanging fruit? And how does a family know that their loved one's case is too difficult, a hostage too far out of reach?”

Then came the release of Brittney Griner, a WNBA superstar arrested in February 2022 at an airport near Moscow, after authorities said she tried to enter the country with vape cartridges containing cannabis oil. The U.S. government declared Griner wrongly detained. Still, she was convicted and sentenced to nine years in a Russian labor camp.

Yet 10 months after her arrest, [Griner was freed in an exchange](#) for convicted Russian arms trafficker Viktor Bout, known as the Merchant of Death for his role in a conspiracy to kill Americans and aid a terrorist organization.

For a second time, U.S. government negotiations with Russia to bring American citizens home left Whelan behind.

“Brittney is free,” David Whelan said. “And Paul is still a hostage.”

Then, in March of 2023, [Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich](#) was arrested while on assignment in Yekaterinburg. He was accused of collecting secrets for the U.S. government about a Russian military complex, according to the [Russian news agency Tass](#).

Gershkovich denied the charges, as did his employer and top Biden administration officials, who swiftly declared him wrongfully detained. He was convicted last month and sentenced to 16 years, the first time since the Cold War that Russia had put a US reporter on trial for espionage.

Whelan's family expressed consternation that yet another American could be charged in Russia, convicted and released before Paul Whelan.

“Paul told our parents he feels as though the U.S. government has abandoned him,” David Whelan said.

“We understand completely how he feels. We have heard that there is lobbying to encourage the White House and State Department to divert resources, currently applied to Paul's case, away from it. We don't have the ability to substantiate (that), but it gibes with our concern that ... the U.S. government might consider making a decision that leaves Paul in Russia.”

Finally, now, it's Whelan's turn.

His sister is eager to see how much his ongoing incarceration has changed him.

“I no longer know what my brother looks like,” she said in April 2023 at the UN Security Council Stakeout on Russia's Wrongful Detention Practices. “The images that we see on television and

in the news? That's Paul Whelan in the life he was living before he was taken captive. No one has been allowed to take a photo of him since his trial almost three years ago.

"Paul was a corporate security director. He had a job he loved, a home, a life of hope and opportunity. All that has been taken away from him by Russia, a country that revels in its culture of lies, its tradition of hostage diplomacy."

She said Russia has made it a practice to arbitrarily arrest U.S. citizens for concessions.

"It is the action of a terrorist state," Elizabeth Whelan said.

"First my brother Paul Whelan, then Trevor Reed, both tourists. The sports star Brittney Griner. And now the journalist Evan Gershkovich.

"And who will be their next victim? It doesn't take a stretch of the imagination to see that Russia will continue to push the boundaries."

Free Press reporter Todd Spangler, USA Today and Bloomberg News contributed to this story. Contact Kristen Jordan Shamus: kshamus@freepress.com. Follow her on Twitter @kristenshamus. Subscribe to the Free Press.

LOCAL NEWS



Kayla Clarke, Senior Web Producer
Published: **August 1, 2024 at 1:07 PM**
Tags: **Paul Whelan**

Timeline: Michigan man Paul Whelan released from Russian prison after more than 5 years

Massive prisoner swap frees 12 people



Paul Whelan

Michigan man Paul Whelan has been released from Russian prison after spending more than five years in custody.

Paul Whelan was freed as part of a massive prisoner swap that freed two dozen people, according to the White House.

Until now, Paul Whelan had been left out of other high-profile prisoner swaps involving Russia.

In April 2022, Marine veteran [Trevor Reed](#) was released and in December 2022, WNBA star [Brittney Griner](#) was released.

Here's a look at the timeline of events from his arrest to his release:

December 2018

In December 2019, Paul Whelan was detained in Russia. His brother, David Whelan, told MSNBC that Paul Whelan was part of a wedding party. The friend who was getting married had asked him to lead tours around the area because he hadn't been to Russia before.

"He loves to travel so I wasn't at all surprised that he would be confident going to Russia. He has a law enforcement background, he's got his Marine background, he does corporate security and he's aware of the risks of traveling in certain parts of the world," David Whelan told [MSNBC](#).

According to the report, Whelan had been in Russia for a day or two when he stopped contacting his family in the U.S. and missed the wedding. The family learned he had been detained from online news reports.

January 2019

In January 2019, Paul Whelan was [formally charged with spying](#) by Russian investigative agencies. Paul Whelan's family and Russian friends insisted that he is not a spy.

February 2020

In February 2020, David Whelan [spoke to Local 4](#) about his brother. He said he was grateful that the new U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Sullivan visited Paul in Prison.

“Paul’s case had gone on far too long, shielded in secrecy and hidden from view, and there is nothing fair or transparent about it,” Sullivan said.

Whelan reportedly had a hernia. His brother said that the injury had gone untreated and Russians were using a language barrier to keep Paul Whelan in the dark.

“He doesn’t know,” David Whelan said. “The FSB won’t allow him to speak to an English-speaking physician to get information about what his problem is and both the prison and FSB -- they’re blocking any sharing of medical records.”

June 2020

In June 2020, Paul Whelan was convicted and sentenced to 16 years in Russian prison for espionage by a court in Moscow. Paul Whelan and his family have maintained his innocence.

February 2021

In February 2021, Whelan’s family [had an hour-long Zoom call](#) with at least 80 people in the State Department.

Those on the call heard about a new law passed in December -- The Levinson Act -- that gives the federal government more tools to implement sanctions to give nations holding American citizens under suspicious circumstances reasons to release them.

July 2022

President Joe Biden spoke to Paul Whelan's family in July 2022. David Whelan told [Local 4 News](#) that the phone call from the president came after a week full of emotions.

“We do have a certain amount of communication at lower levels of the state department about Paul's case, obviously, we speak to the embassy on a regular basis to make sure that he's actually healthy and well. But when you have the president call, it's obviously a huge honor to have the president speak to you and to reassure you about your loved one's case,” said David Whelan. “I think it's symbolic. I don't actually think that a presidential call means anything in the sense of it doesn't mean that something's about to happen. It doesn't mean that progress has been made that wasn't going to be made otherwise.”

---> **Watch:** [New hope for Paul Whelan to return home as government officials step in](#)

December 2022

In December 2022, David Whelan [said he had been in contact with his brother](#) after being unable to reach him since November.

“Paul (Whelan) has been able to clarify in calls with our parents what happened,” David Whelan said. “It seems as though the prison committed an own goal, bringing a lot of attention to Paul's whereabouts for no reason.”

On Dec. 8, 2022, [Brittney Griner was freed from Russia](#) in a high-level prisoner swap. That swap did not include Paul Whelan.

Whelan's brother David said in a statement to the Associated Press he was "so glad" for Griner's release but also disappointed for his family. He credited the White House with giving the Whelan family advance notice and said he did not fault officials for making the deal.

---> Read: [Trump did not care about freeing Michigan native Paul Whelan from Russian jail during his presidency, brother says](#)

April 2023

In April 2023, [Paul Whelan told his parents he felt as though the U.S. government had abandoned him](#). His feeling of abandonment came months after the high-profile prisoner swap that brought WNBA star Britney Griner home.

August 2023

In August 2023, Russian state-funded media Russia Today was released that showed the [first footage of Paul Whelan since 2020](#).

David Whelan said the video showcases the strength, determination and contempt of his brother, where earlier he was worried Paul was losing hope.

---> [Paul Whelan speaks with US Secretary of State about release from Russian prison camp](#)

November 2023

In November 2023, [Paul Whelan said he was assaulted by a prisoner while working a sewing table in a Russian labor camp](#). Whelan said he was concerned that more attacks would

occur at any time due to the various sharp implements in the workshop, which include various sharp tools in the workshop like a shear that the other prisoner held during the attack.

---> ['We ain't giving up': President Biden holds out hope that hostage from Novi will return home](#)

December 2023

Dec. 28, 2023, [marked five years in Russian custody](#) for Paul Whelan. Earlier in the month, Russian President Vladimir Putin was asked about Whelan and the Russian president said he would like to make a deal with the United States.

At the time, David Whelan said he believed the U.S. had made offers to the Russian government to get his brother home, but that Russia had rejected the offers so far.

May 2024

In May 2024, [Paul Whelan expressed concerns to CNN](#) that the arrest of another American in Russia could hurt his chances of being freed.

“Unfortunately, if this gentleman is declared wrongfully detained, it will sort of start negotiations for Evan and I all over again because then there’ll be the three of us,” Paul Whelan said. “This is one of the problems that we’ve had in the past. They were negotiating for me, and then it was Trevor and me, and then it was Brittney (Griner) and me. And now it’s Evan and me. And every time they’ve negotiated, it’s always been starting fresh when there’s another person involved. So yeah, it is a bit of a concern.”

August 2024

On Aug. 1, 2024, [the United States and Russia completed their biggest prisoner swap](#) in post-Soviet history. Moscow released Paul Whelan, journalist Evan Gershkovich, and 20 other people.

---> [Read: US and Russia complete biggest prisoner swap in post-Soviet history, freeing Gershkovich and Whelan](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



[Kayla Clarke](#)

Kayla is a Web Producer for ClickOnDetroit. Before she joined the team in 2018 she worked at WILX in Lansing as a digital producer.