




# ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY

SUBJECT	BRAND GUIDELINES		
NUMBER	25-01	SIGNED DATE	07/21/2025
ISSUED BY	Mark Washington, City Manager 		
PREPARED BY	David Green, Communications Department		
REVISED	NA		
ASSOCIATED POLICIES			
CITY VALUES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accountability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collaboration	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Customer Service	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Equity	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Innovation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sustainability	

## SUMMARY

This Administrative Policy (Policy) provides guidelines for the management of the City of Grand Rapids' visual identity and branding to maintain continuity and consistency across the organization.

## PURPOSE

People often use "logo" and "brand" interchangeably but, while a strong and established logo is important, a brand is much more than a simple graphic. A solid visual brand identity should reflect and represent the qualities, goals, mission, and values of the organization in the minds of customers.

The visual aspects of the brand – from colors to fonts, to logos – serve as a visual cue in the mind of the consumer. The City's current logo – commonly referred to as the "Calder" logo – has a strong history in Grand Rapids and serves as an anchor to the organization's identity. Over the years, however, a lack of central management has led to a fractured visual look and style with some City departments using their own individually designed logos, non-standard fonts, and color palettes. This lack of a coherent brand limits recognition as part of the larger City organization. It can also create confusion among residents and visitors as to what entities and departments are officially functioning on the City's behalf.

This Policy establishes the City's Communications Director, or their designee, as the keeper of the City Brand and provides the requisite authority for management of the City's branding efforts.

Nothing in this Policy shall be construed to supersede or alter City Commission Policy 200-06 – Third-Party Use of City Logo.

## **POLICY APPLICABILITY**

This Policy applies to all departments, employees, elected officials, appointed officials, appointed members of City boards and commissions, interns, temporary employees, and assistant positions, both paid and unpaid, and any other group or individual who serves or is affiliated with the City of Grand Rapids.

## **DEFINITIONS**

- Brand: A combination of elements – such as style, tone, logos, names, etc. – that communicate identity and create a distinct impression.
- Logo: The visual representation of the City, program, project, or product, encompassing the name, logo and visual appeal. The components usually consist of a logo, one or two main colors and two or three additional colors; one or two different fonts; and some graphic design rules and elements.
- Image: The impression of the City’s total personality – real and imaginary qualities and shortcomings.
- Identity: The means by which the City is recognized through both tangible and intangible ways. Identity includes branding elements but also includes the mission, vision, values, and even the way with which the organization carries out its work.
- Brand Management: The process of maintaining, improving, and upholding a brand so that the name is associated with positive results. Brand management is built on a marketing foundation but focuses directly on the brand and how that brand can remain favorable to customers. Therefore, brand management involves several important aspects such as customer relations and satisfaction, business processes, staff motivation and internal communication. The best brand management is to simply serve our customers well.
- Brand Equity: The value or capital of positive sentiment that the brand has created.
- City Brand Style Guide: A living document serving as a resource for all employees of the City by providing the set brand standards to be used throughout the organization.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. The City Manager’s Office is responsible for:
  - a. Shaping the City’s Identity by providing vision, mission, and values to the organization, overseeing day-to-day operations, and ensuring high-quality service delivery to our customers.
  - b. Providing direction and expectations for branding.

2. The Communications Department is responsible for:
  - a. Establishing and enforcing the City's brand standards for all departments, offices, and associated City-controlled entities.
  - b. Creating and maintaining official graphics – including establishing a process to create and retire logos, graphics, and other visual elements as needed.
  - c. Developing, maintaining, and implementing the City's Brand Style Guide.
  - d. Making the Brand Style Guide available for use by all City employees.
  - e. Conducting periodic audits of City Brand elements to ensure compliance and consistency.
  - f. Assisting City Departments with implementation and advising on appropriate use to accomplish their communications goals.
3. City Attorney's Office is responsible for:
  - a. Continuing to administer Commission Policy 200-06 – Third-Party Use of City Logo.
  - b. Advising the Communications Department of statutes, regulations, and case law requiring modification to this policy.
  - c. Assisting with legal interpretations of this Administrative Policy and its implementation.
4. City Departments are responsible for:
  - a. Managing internal compliance.
  - b. Requesting exceptions of this Administrative Policy from the Communications Director.
  - c. Implementing the Brand Style Guide and working with the Communications Department to request updates to the Brand Style Guide as needed.

## **BRAND STANDARDS**

Upon implementation of the City's Brand Style Guide, all City users should begin using the City's Brand Style Guide as the sole source for appropriate materials, guidelines, and resources pertaining to the City's Brand.

1. Logos:
  - a. City Department Logos – All City Departments will immediately adopt the standardized Department logo contained within the Brand Style Guide for official City business. This does not include logos, emblems, or graphics created for specific programs or campaigns. Public Safety Agencies are partially exempted – see below.
  - b. Specialty Logos – Logos that were created for special programs, campaigns, or purposes beyond City Departmental identification. Those logos may continue to be used until the completion of the program to provide continuity.

- c. All Specialty Logos created after the effective date of this policy will require a preliminary review by the Communications Department to ensure consistency the City's overall brand standards.
- 2. Public Safety Departments Partially Exempted:
  - a. Understanding both the Police and Fire services have longstanding national and local heraldic elements, the Communications Department will work with both the fire and police departments for 24 months following the implementation of the Brand Style Guide to identify which logos, emblems, and other visual elements should be retained and which should be retired.
  - b. Exceptions will be documented and integrated into the City's Brand Style Guide and future changes will comply with this Policy and the Brand Style Guide.
- 3. Affiliates, partners, and associated entities partially exempted:
  - a. For the purposes of this policy, affiliates, partners and associated entities are any organization or group that was either explicitly established by the City or functions on the City's behalf in a quasi-governmental capacity such as improvement districts, development authorities, or limited liability companies established for a specific public purpose.
  - b. Those entities are partially exempted from this policy as they retain oversight of any unique identity and branding in accordance with their existing charter or by-laws.
  - c. If they choose to use any form or portion of the City logo or brand, they must adhere to the City's Style Guide and the review process outlined in section 2 above.
- 4. Interagency and external organization exemption:
  - a. This policy does not apply to organizations to which the City is subordinate or equal member which has established its own brand identity or standards.
  - b. When included to denote the City's involvement, only the approved City logo provided by the City Communications Office should be used for inclusion on any of the organization's materials.

## **EXCEPTIONS**

Exceptions to this Policy and the Brand Style Guide may be requested through the City's Communications Director. In the event an exception is denied, Department Directors may appeal to the Assistant City Manager. The Assistant City Manager's decision on the matter shall be considered final.

## **UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES**

When circumstances arise not addressed in this Policy or the Brand Style Guide, consult with the Department of Communications to advise and assist.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BRAND STYLE GUIDE**

### **1. Timeline:**

- a. City Departments should begin implementation of the Brand Style Guide immediately upon City Manager's approval of the Policy.
- b. Digital materials should be fully brought into compliance within 90 days of implementation of the Brand Style Guide to include websites, social media, and email signatures.
- c. All new material purchases shall follow the Brand Style Guide.
- d. Previously purchased materials such as flyers, letterheads, paper stock, business cards, "swag", or other on-hand items which do not comply with this Policy or the Brand Style Guide may continue to be used for a period of up to 24 months from the effective date of this policy.
- e. Durable materials such as signage, building facades, vehicle decals, etc. will be changed out during normal end-of-life replacement or during capitol project improvement window whichever comes first.
- f. City Departments will work with the Communications Department on items not specifically included in the Brand Style Guide to meet the intent of the Brand Style Guide and this Policy.

### **2. Audits:**

- a. Periodically, the Communications Department may conduct an audit of existing logos and use to ensure compliance and consistency.
- b. These audits are non-punitive, and the Communications Department will assist in bringing any violations of the Policy and the Brand Style Guide into compliance.