

Unhoused or Poor in Grand Rapids? Know Your Rights Under the New GR Ordinances.

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The Main Changes in the GR Ordinances

New GR ordinances:

- **Ban** “loitering” after you are asked to leave or if you interfere with the function of a door.
- **Ban** “accosting” another person within 20 feet of an ATM, public transportation vehicle, outdoor dining area, or a special event.
- **Limit** storage of personal property in public spaces.
- **Ban** tents in public areas.

This information is an overview of your basic rights. It is not a substitute for legal advice or for reading the ordinances. Contact an attorney if you believe your rights have been violated.

Know your Rights. You have the right to:

- **Approach people and ask for money or help.** But you are not allowed to “accost” someone when asking for money/help within 20 ft of an ATM, public transportation, outdoor dining area, or a special event.
- **Spend time inside and outside of buildings.** But you have to leave if asked by the owner or occupant, and you cannot block or impede a doorway.
- **Carry your property with you.** If it can fit into a 32-gallon container, you have the right to have it with you. Property that doesn’t fit may be impounded by the city. You can reclaim it within 30 days.
- **Fair notice when your property is moved or impounded.** The city is required to provide notice either before or after they remove your property, depending on the situation.
- **Note: Officers may not respect your rights. If an officer is in the wrong, you should still follow their orders. Afterwards, File a complaint.**

Ex: 32-gallon container



Frequently Asked Questions:

- **When can the city impound (take and store) my property?** If it is attended (you have it with you): if it couldn't fit in a 32-gallon container; it is blocking the street, a bike lane, sidewalk, or a special event, like a concert at Rosa Parks Circle; it is within 10 ft of a driveway, 5 ft of a door, 2 ft of a fire hydrant; or it is blocking the use of a bench. If it is unattended (you leave it somewhere so you can come back and get it later): any unattended property stored in a public area can be taken, but the city has to give you notice.
- **When can the city throw away my property?** The city can throw away what it determines to be garbage, unsafe items, or property that is an immediate threat to public health or safety. If officers throw away anything else, file a complaint. Officers **cannot** throw away property just because it does not fit in a 32-gallon container or was left unattended.
- **What does notice mean? What will it look like?** The city must post a flier that generally describes what property was or will be removed; gives the date of removal or when the flier was posted; and provides the address where they are storing or will store your property, a phone number you can call, and a website with more information.

- **How do I get my property back?** Follow the instructions on the flier or call the city for instructions. You have 30 days to go get your property. You do not need an ID or to pay to reclaim your property. You will need proof that the property is yours. This can be as simple as providing a detailed description of the property, where it was stored, and the date it was taken. *We recommend taking pictures of your property if you are able.* If you do not reclaim, the city can throw it away.
- **Are all tents banned?** You cannot use a tent in any public area (like parks, roads, sidewalks). You cannot make your own shelter that uses any public property like trees, bushes, walls, and benches or make any shelter that blocks a street or sidewalk.
- **Can the city take my tent?** They can take down a tent in a public area. They can remove and store your tent, but must give you notice so you can go get it. They can't throw away your tent unless it is a hazard. If they do, file a complaint.
- **What does "loitering" mean?** Basically, being in a place with no apparent reason for being there.
- **What does "accosting" mean?** Basically, making another person feel harassed, intimidated, or afraid you will commit a crime. Forcing them to talk to you when they don't want to or they have said no.