



# City of Grand Rapids, Michigan

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

GEORGE K. HEARTWELL  
MAYOR

July 2, 2012

Susan Hedman, Regional Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Ralph Metcalfe Federal Building  
77 West Jackson Blvd.  
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Regional Administrator Hedman:

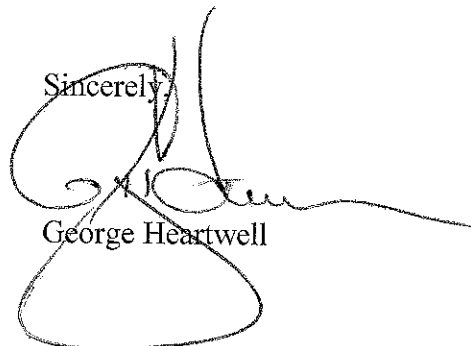
Thank you, again, for your recent visit to Grand Rapids. I know from talking subsequently with other participants in our meeting that they appreciated very much the opportunity to meet you and talk with you.

As you've seen first hand, Grand Rapids is truly a "green" city and aspires to work with you and U.S. EPA to set and achieve even more ambitious goals. To that end, I'm writing to ask for your help with a exciting project to restore the namesake rapids to downtown Grand Rapids. This project is central to the vision of Grand Rapids' revised Master Plan developed through the multi-stakeholder, collaborative "Green Grand Rapids" process: "We will succeed in making our most important natural feature – the Grand River increasingly visible and usable by converting older riverfront industrial sites to parks and new development that welcome people to the river's edge. We will recreate the rapids in the river as a reminder of our heritage."

As described in the attached fact sheet, this project includes a suite of benefits – water quality, social, community, economic, recreational and ecological. As such, it dovetails nicely with Administrator Jackson's deep commitment to revitalization of urban waters. Business and community leaders involved in this project have been in touch with EPA water office staff in D.C. and Region 5 and we believe it would be an excellent pilot project for the multi-agency *Urban Waters Federal Partnership*.

We understand from Surabhi Shah and Roy Simon of EPA's Office of Water in D.C. that the agencies are in the late stages of finalizing nominees for the next round of Partnership pilot projects. Region V currently has one first-round pilot project in Northwest Indiana and I am writing to ask for your help in nominating within EPA the Grand River rapids restoration project for inclusion in the next round of pilot projects. Time is short, so I am eager to work with you and your staff to supply additional information supportive of this nomination.

Sincerely,



George Heartwell

# Making the Grand River grand again

We will succeed in making our most important natural feature – the Grand River – increasingly visible and usable by converting older riverfront industrial sites to parks and new development that welcome people to the river’s edge. We will recreate the rapids in the river as a reminder of our heritage.

*Green Grand Rapids (2012)*

Grand Rapids has awakened to the fact that the Grand River is one of its most important natural, economic and community resources. In 2012, through the collaborative *Green Grand Rapids* process, the City of Grand Rapids updated its master plan to “focus on the importance of green infrastructure, sustainability and quality of life in maintaining the city’s livability and competitive edge.” This plan embraces the critical importance of the Grand River – running through the heart of the core urban area; connecting downtown with underserved neighborhoods, suburban communities and rural landscapes. As the longest river in Michigan, it is a critical component of the Lake Michigan ecosystem and the rapids represent regionally rare habitat. “As Grand Rapids’ most significant natural asset, the Grand River can and should play an increasingly important role in enhancing the city’s quality of life. This can be achieved by continuing to expand the visibility of the river, improving access to and along its edges and encouraging active uses on and adjacent to the water.”

Community and business leaders have worked with local government and recreational enthusiasts to launch an initial project at the heart of the urban river restoration vision – to restore the namesake rapids in downtown Grand Rapids. In addition to serving as a community catalyst for full river restoration, the project will remedy the degradation of the River’s ecosystem functions caused by five low head dams, flood walls, urban encroachment, and channelization. It will include removing or modifying these dams, and enhancing the river bed and banks, to restore the aquatic ecosystem and recreation function of the historic rapids. The goals of this project include:

- enhancing water quality and aquatic habitats;
- improving access and recreational opportunities for residents, especially urban youth;
- connecting underserved communities on the West side to the vibrant downtown economy on the East shore;
- attracting tourism, businesses and employment opportunities;
- enhancing natural aesthetics of the riverfront; and,
- generating a stewardship ethic for the river through education and outreach, especially with urban youth.

Grand Rapids Whitewater will lead the project to restore the historic rapids, for which preliminary studies have been completed by the engineering firm of RiverRestoration ([riverrestoration.org](http://riverrestoration.org)). An advisory committee will assure coordination of this initial project with the overall river restoration vision. Committee members are being recruited from leaders from business, government, community organizations, user groups, conservation and environmental groups.

*The Executive Summary of the project is available at [www.grandrapidswhitewater.org](http://www.grandrapidswhitewater.org).*