

CASE STUDY



payit

Putting the power in the hands
of Grand Rapids' residents for paying
utilities, property taxes and more.



grppayit
powered by **payit**

CITY: Grand Rapids, MI

LAUNCHED: August 2017

USERS: 200,000 residents and 6,000 small businesses

USED FOR: Utility payments, property taxes and more



“PayIt is an incredible system our city has integrated to provide a way for individuals in our community to interact with us through a virtual platform. I don’t think we could have done some of the things we’ve done at City Hall without PayIt.”

– Rosalynn Bliss, Mayor, City of Grand Rapids

The need for automation

In 2015, the City of Grand Rapids, MI, wanted to make their website work better for their community, so they did some research to uncover how it was being used. They found that of the 12,000 published webpages, 86% of user traffic was related to bill payments or invoice information. What’s more, 366,000 bill payment checks were being mailed each year, in addition to walk-in payments.

“Our website wasn’t fulfilling a critical need for our residents and that was, how can I find out information about my bill?”

– John Globensky, Treasurer, City of Grand Rapids

As a city that prides itself on innovation, Grand Rapids leadership asked themselves: How can we become a

city with a digital front door? How can we change the way we work with our residents? How can we change the way payments are viewed?

With that, the City set out to find a digital provider that could help them accomplish the following goals:

- **Enhance** the user experience by giving residents information on how to pay their bills—allowing them to pay whenever, wherever and on whatever device they choose
- **Decrease** the number of checks mailed for payments by removing barriers and pain points associated with current solutions
- **Help** customers to be compliant and avoid late fees
- **Reduce** or eliminate long lines at City Hall
- **Innovate** with technology to improve city functions and eliminate paper archives

From a management perspective, City Treasurer John Globensky was also looking for opportunities to elevate his team. For him, that meant shifting them from being “transaction processors” to “knowledge workers.”

Finding the right solution

The City knew they had to invest in a website redesign, to improve service delivery and payments had to be a critical part of the solution since that's why most residents were visiting the site.

The City sent out a Request for Information (RFI) to eight specific companies and also published it as a national request. They ultimately chose PayIt because they felt the company's expertise specifically aligned with what they wanted to accomplish.

"We were not looking for a standalone function," Globensky said. "We were looking for a partner that could help us elevate city services to better connect with our community, residents and businesses."

The City started with four services: water, parking tickets, property taxes and refuse, which comprise about 90% of their collections.

"PayIt is a culmination of our search to find a technology partner that could provide all this and more—one that had the same synergy, outlook and mission that we did."

— John Globensky, Treasurer, City of Grand Rapids

They later added three more services—accounts receivable, miscellaneous receivables (permits, code violations, rental certifications, etc.) and community development block grant loan payments—saving over 360,000 manual transactions over four years.

Thanks to GR PayIt, customers can interact with the City on their own time without having to worry about sending a check to pay their bills or visiting city offices to pay in person.

Here's how the City uses GR PayIt to improve city operations and provide an incredible experience to their residents:

- **Residents pay their bill online**, from anywhere, on whatever device they choose.
- **The City uploads payments** right into their backend software. Payments are uploaded everyday with no lag time.
- **Because the process is automated**, there is less room for human error, improving accuracy in record-keeping.
- **The shift from manual checks to electronic payments** has presented an opportunity to reimagine the City's work to include how they can better serve residents and create future innovation.

Why GR PayIt?

"We were seeking to energize customer engagement and user experience with the goal of encouraging more electronic payments. We needed to understand and connect with our customers. We knew we had to be missing something. Our motivation was to meet customers where they were and that was on their smartphone, iPad and laptop."

— Rosalynn Bliss, Mayor, City of Grand Rapids

Reaping the Rewards of GR PayIt

The City of Grand Rapids has recorded impressive results since implementing GR PayIt and “putting the power in residents’ hands” in 2017.



“We’ve seen the number of checks mailed for water utility payments alone drop from 255,000 to 175,000 per year. Now that’s a game changer.”

– John Globensky
Treasurer, City of Grand Rapids

- ▶ **160,000 DOWNLOADS**
of GR PayIt out of 200,000 residents and visitors
- ▶ **70% INCREASE IN TRANSACTIONS**
from 349,613 to 595,594
- ▶ **216% INCREASE IN REVENUE**
from electronic payments, from \$29.6M to 93.4M
- ▶ **576,000+** manual transactions saved
- ▶ **\$200,000 DECREASE** in water bill late fees,
from \$1.2 million to \$1 million
- ▶ **50%+ DROP IN CHECKS MAILED**
from 366,000 to 176,000

Save a tree, save the planet?

“One of my priorities as Mayor is to reduce our carbon footprint, and getting more people to use GR PayIt helps enormously with that.”

– Rosalynn Bliss, Mayor, City of Grand Rapids

City leadership is especially proud of GR PayIt’s contributions to environmental sustainability.

Have you ever thought about the environmental toll of checks, envelopes, and even stamps? John Globensky has.

“The amount of paper that didn’t get mailed to the City was about four and a half pallets—that’s 180 boxes of 10-ream copy paper per pallet,” he said. “What if we took that to a state level and found we were saving 20 pallets per state, for 50 states? How many trees did that account for? How did that impact the carbon

footprint? Have we, as treasurers, ever thought about how sustainability might connect to our work and what other unintended consequences to the environment might be?”

“As city leaders, maybe we all have greater input into the global culture than we think we do.”

– John Globensky, Treasurer, City of Grand Rapids

Globensky estimates an additional savings of \$364,000 to Grand Rapids customers over four years because they didn’t have to use envelopes, stamps and checks to send in payments. He also notes this does not account for the value of any time saved for the customer or the City.

Building a knowledge-based workforce

As the number of checks diminished, the City was able to elevate and train its employees to take on more strategic work. They can use their knowledge of city departments to provide the best customer service, educate customers, and be proactive about addressing resident's needs.

“Small steps sometimes lead to monumental changes. That’s what we’ve been seeing with GR PayIt.”

– John Globensky, Treasurer, City of Grand Rapids

No one likes late fees—not even the City

Reducing the number of late fees residents pay is another important outcome of introducing GR PayIt. “By notifying people ahead of time about their bills, we have a way to help them pay them on time, and if they’re struggling financially, we need to be supportive and find ways to help reduce those late fees,” Bliss said.

“I wanted us to do better for our residents and PayIt allows us to do that.”

– Rosalynn Bliss, Mayor, City of Grand Rapids

Where does the money go?

Bringing more money into the City from improved payments collection yields more gain—both for the City and the community.

According to Globensky, the money collected from city services goes to many different functions—from local taxing authorities (public schools and county operations) and City operations (water, sewer, refuse, parking operations and general operating funds).

Returning value to the residents is key to the process. For Globensky, the return on investment is not only a business decision, but one that is personally meaningful.

“We’re going to look to see where there are other innovations we can touch with GR PayIt.”

– John Globensky, Treasurer, City of Grand Rapids



How can we help you? Talk with one of our experts today.

PayIt has a team of local and state government experts that can walk your agency through the platform and available services. From there, we will discuss a solution that solves your unique business challenges.

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