

# Community Development Department

City of Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin



## 2021 & 2022 Annual Report



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# Introduction

The Community Development Department's mission is to promote a safe, diverse, and dynamic vibrant community by enhancing the living, working and recreation choices for community residents and visitors. To fulfill this mission, the Department is organized into four different divisions: 1 – Economic Development; 2 – Planning and Zoning; 3 - Permits and Inspections; 4 - Neighborhood Improvement / Code Enforcement. Department staff work together to ensure compliance with local and state ordinances and codes and fulfill the goals and objectives of the City's Comprehensive Plan and other planning documents.

This report covers the years 2021 and 2022. Several major projects and activities occurred within those two years, including, but not limited to:

- ❖ Starts and completions of several construction projects, mostly institutional in nature or in the food service industry.
- ❖ Planning for the County Jail, including the establishment of a Planned Development District and vacation of Avon Street.
- ❖ Upgrade & implementation of the department's permitting, code enforcement and planning software Mygov to the newest version (2022).
- ❖ Implementation of U.S. Economic Development Administration Cares Act grant dollars to analyze, strategize, and plan for the papermill site, which included the hiring of planning firm Vandewalle and Associates.
- ❖ Issuance of over 1600 permits for combined years 2021 and 2022 with a total construction value of \$66.6 million and a corresponding permit fee revenue of just over \$266,000.
- ❖ Adoption of the new City Sign ordinance (2021).
- ❖ Hiring of Associate Planner, Carrie Edmondson, to assist with planning and zoning initiatives (2021).
- ❖ Implementation of Phase 1 and 2 of the Wayfinding Signage project.
- ❖ Development of a Public Art and Creative Placemaking Plan (2022)
- ❖ Amendment to the Historic Preservation Chapter and pursuit of a Historic Preservation Commission to create state and national Historic Districts, allowing businesses and homeowners access to tax credits (2022).

This report will outline the major projects and activities that occurred in 2021 and 2022 with respect to each individual division.

Lastly, I want to thank all the staff within the department for their hard work and dedication throughout these two years, with a special thanks to those who assisted with this report. Much of the work outlined here would not be possible without the combined efforts of the Community Development Department team!

If you should have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



**Kyle Kearns**

Director of Community Development

# Economic Development

## Developments

There were several significant projects that were completed or began within the city during 2021 and 2022. Summaries of those projects have been provided below.

### 1. Coffee Shops (2021)

In 2021 Starbucks and Caribou Coffee constructed buildings on vacant properties on 8<sup>th</sup> Street South. Additionally, a local business, Out of the Box Coffee, also expanded with an addition.



### 2. Business Expansion – FOCUS (2021)

Several businesses have expanded within the community, some physically and others internally. One of noteworthy mention is FOCUS, which is a great example of partnership and ingenuity. Three organizations, The Neighborhood Table, South Wood County Emerging Pantry Shelf (SWEPS), and Rapids Family Backpacks, joined forces to have an integrated focus on food insecurity within the community. Sparhawk Trucking provided space for the new organization. FOCUS has since expanded with a building addition and continues to impact the community in astounding ways.



### 3. Institutional Developments – Schools and County Jail (2021-22)

Significant improvements were planned and made to several institutional facilities in the community. Most notably, development and recreation improvements were made to the Lincoln High School quad baseball complex and campus, along with a new main entrance addition. Furthermore, planning and construction of the Wood County Jail occurred. These community improvements will have a significant impact on the City's quality of life.



Photo Credit: Point of Beginning

### 4. Qdoba (2021)

Qdoba renovated the former Hardees building on 8<sup>th</sup> Street South, totaling 5,000 square feet. The renovation included interior and exterior improvements, as well as the creation of a white box space for a future tenant suite if desired. The restaurant follows the trend of increasing dining options within the area.



### 5. Fire Department Addition (2021)

The City Fire Department expanded the east side station on East Riverview Expressway with an addition and interior renovation. This important City project allowed for improved operations and efficiencies, the necessity of which became evident during the pandemic. Future renovations on a much smaller scale may also be made to the west side fire station.



### 6. Housing – Mary’s Place (2022)

The multi-family housing industry has recovered slowly after the recession and pandemic; however, the city still promotes varied housing opportunities. One opportunity meeting a significant need in the community is Mary’s Place, currently under renovation on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue South. The 11-unit facility serves as transitional housing for no-income/low-income individuals, and temporary housing for the homeless. This project is a great example of adaptive reuse, while meeting the needs of the community.



### 7. Marshfield Clinic – Emergency Services (2022)

Marshfield Clinic began construction of an 18,000 square foot 10-bed hospital facility. The facility is located on the existing Marshfield Clinic parcel but is a separate building. The project includes shared access, parking, and signage. The use will help to meet the health needs of the community’s aging population and will offer additional emergency room options.



## 8. Land Sales

A few City properties were sold, including the former Eagles Building (161-63 2<sup>nd</sup> St. N.), vacant lots on East Jackson Street, and 12 Ave. S. The lot on East Jackson was transformed into an outdoor space by Whiskey Rapids Saloon. Additional opportunities are being explored, for example, VFW has an interest in developing City property.



## Other Community & Economic Development Initiatives

Below are summaries of other economic development initiatives that were completed or are underway within the department.

### ❖ Former Shopko Retail Complex

The city has been working with the new owner of the Shopko Complex to develop the building into four tenant suites. Additionally, the city applied for a WEDC grant in the amount of \$250,000 to cover the costs to construct an additional loading dock in the building. Furthermore, two outlots in front of the building have development potential and interest because of the Shopko redevelopment. Construction is anticipated for the summer of 2023.

### ❖ Property Redevelopment

The City has engaged with a developer for a mixed-use development on the downtown triangle property, near the Wood County Courthouse. Other properties in and around downtown are also a priority, such as the Tribune Block and former foundry property. Staff have engaged with owners of each property to provide guidance and assistance on each redevelopment opportunity, which will start to take shape over the next year. Also looking ahead, the city will continue to promote development opportunities, and is slated to host a developer tour in 2023 in partnership with the regional economic development agency Centergy.

# Permits & Inspections

## Permit Data

Below is a table that outlines building permits issued in 2020, 2021, and 2022, which compares figures for each year.

### Residential and Commercial Permits

Permit Type	2020			2021			2022		
	#	Total Value	Total Fees	#	Total Value	Total Fees	#	Total Value	Total Fees
Commercial New or Addition	5	\$1,618,501	\$4,333	11	\$4,295,944	\$2,715	13	\$22,805,298	\$14,695
Commercial HVAC, Electrical, Plumbing	84	\$5,461,206	\$30,076	90	\$3,837,983	\$21,575	90	\$11,881,385	\$46,331
Commercial Remodel	40	\$3,333,182	\$21,633	51	\$5,455,704	\$32,702	43	\$5,347,988	\$42,844
Commercial Signs	20	\$222,029	\$3,173	21	\$147,795	\$2,295	23	\$188,436	\$2,210
New Single-Family Residential	2	\$361,670	\$926	3	\$1,149,720	\$3,276	7	\$2,274,225	\$5,775
New Two-Family Residential	6	\$682,500	\$5,543	0	\$0	\$0	6	\$785,000	\$3,546
New Multi-Family Residential	0	\$0	\$0	0	\$0	\$0	0	\$0	\$0
Residential Accessory Buildings & Additions	42	\$304,530	\$2,406	54	\$743,654	\$3,501	33	\$364,224	\$2,473
Residential Deck & Fence	83	\$324,215	\$3,329	95	\$323,321	\$3,854	112	\$408,482	\$4,441
Residential Electrical, HVAC & Plumbing	204	\$908,365	\$13,736	334	\$1,325,136	\$21,204	238	\$1,021,476	\$15,276
Residential Alternative Energy	2	\$20,005	\$150	2	\$42,533	\$497	2	\$44,796	\$331
Residential Misc.	2	\$19,260	\$131	5	\$28,600	\$202	2	\$1,700	\$80
Residential Remodel	166	\$1,516,212	\$12,990	191	\$1,803,097	\$14,879	212	\$2,238,575	\$18,768
Raze/Demo	9	\$112,802	\$2,391	8	\$96,300	\$1,583	8	\$120,473	\$1,794
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>665</b>	<b>\$14,884,476</b>	<b>\$100,817</b>	<b>865</b>	<b>\$19,249,787</b>	<b>\$108,284</b>	<b>789</b>	<b>\$47,482,059</b>	<b>\$158,564</b>
% Inc. / Dec.				30.08%	29.32%	7.41%	-8.79%	146.66%	46.43%

In reviewing the data above, note that 2020 was not a typical year due to the pandemic and its negative impact on the economy. From 2019 to 2020 permit totals were down 17%, and permit valuation dropped 71%, thereby reducing permit fees by 58%. However, the numbers above for 2021 and 2022 reflect a rebound in the economy. The overall number of permits, valuation, and total fees steadily trended upwards during this time. Because 2020 was an anomaly, the 2021 and 2022 numbers should be compared to 2018 and 2019, which averaged 760 permits, \$52 million in value, and \$240,000 in fees. However, it is important to note that 2018 and 2019 had several large projects, including the YMCA, hospital addition, Matalco, and several multi-family developments, which led to higher values. While the number of commercial permits has risen in the past two years, multi-family projects remain flat. Furthermore, several large institutional or government projects occurred in 2022, which unfortunately will be tax exempt. However, single family and two-family growth remains steady, as well as commercial renovations/remodels. Continued residential growth aligns with the strong housing market in the region, but little to no multi-family development suggests difficulty in constructing and operating such facilities without assistance and/or partnership. The lack of workforce housing is a crucial issue affecting the region which is being addressed across the state. With anticipated commercial and retail development projects in 2023, commercial numbers are anticipated to remain strong. Furthermore, as the city works to investigate subdivision development and mixed-use housing opportunities, growth in residential numbers could also result.




## Other Permit and Inspections Initiatives

### ❖ MyGov Permit Software

The department has been using the same version of permit software for nearly a decade. The software is user friendly but lacks adequate search functions, and other integration functions. Therefore, the department upgraded to the newest MyGov software in early 2022. This included intense training for department staff, and programming enhancements. The much-improved version allows for significantly improved staff efficiency and a fully functional web portal for applicants, amongst other improvements.

### ❖ Guidance Materials & Fact Sheets

Over the last few years, staff have created guidance materials to assist contractors, applicants, and citizens to quickly access municipal code information and apply for permits. These materials have improved the efficiency of staff when communicating with citizens. Newly available materials include fact sheets for fences, accessory buildings, driveways, vision triangle requirements, residences, commercial projects, commercial inspections, and others. Examples of fact sheets are below.



Community Development Department  
444 West Grand Ave. Wisconsin Rapids, WI 544  
(715) 421-8228  
Website: <http://wisrapids.org/>

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**Permit Application Checklist for Obtaining a Residential Fence Permit**


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*The following items must be completed and submitted as a package to apply for a fence permit:*

- Complete uniform residential building permit application. *Property information and Building sections must be filled out, with signature.*
- Complete, detailed site plan demonstrating setbacks and lot dimensions. Existing structures and proposed fencing must be included. This can be hand drawn or overlaid onto an aerial image.
- The owner or applicant shall be responsible for property locating all property lines before construction of any fence. If exact property lines are unknown, the City recommends contacting a professional surveyor.
- Fence Permit fee: \$40.

**Fence Quick Facts:**

- Fences shall be installed with the finished side facing the adjacent property or public right-of-way, and the posts must be located on the interior side of the fence-facing.
- Fences may be installed up to adjacent property lines, with the exception of the public right-of-way in the front yard (a 6-foot setback required). Property owners must maintain their setbacks. Erecting a fence too close to a property line can make it hard to maintain both sides of the fence.
- No fence shall be installed in any yard that will shield any window or opening in a habitable space of a dwelling. A minimum distance of 3 feet shall be maintained between any solid fence and any such window or opening in a dwelling.
- No fence shall be constructed of used or discarded materials in disrepair, including pallets, tree trunks, trash, junk, or other similar items. Materials not specifically manufactured for fencing, such as railroad ties, wooden doors, landscape timbers or utility poles shall not be used for, or in the construction of a fence.
- From alleys – Fences must be a minimum of 5 feet from the alley property line. If the alley does not support traffic, the fence may be located up to, but not over the property line.



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**Permit Application Checklist for Obtaining an Accessory Building Permit**

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**The following items must be completed and submitted as a packet to apply for a garage or shed permit.**

- Uniform Residential/Commercial Building Permit Application:
  - Property Information Section
  - Building Permit Section
  - Electrical, plumbing, live as needed (each will require their own permit)
  - Signatures
  - Note: property owner may act as the contractor
- Complete, detailed site plan demonstrating setbacks and lot dimensions, illustrating where the accessory structure is to be located on the property.
- If site built and larger than 200 square feet, detailed building plans showing the build of the shed/garage. See attached worksheet for assistance.
- See the attached information sheets regarding building code and zoning code requirements. Contact Community Development with further questions.
- Note on fees: The building permit fee is based on the square footage of the structure (5.10/R<sup>2</sup>) with a minimum fee of \$40. The electrical, HVAC, and plumbing permit fees are also based on the square footage of the structure (5.04/R<sup>2</sup>), with a minimum fee of \$40.


**Definition – Accessory Building, residential**

**Description:** A detached building customarily found with a residential use as an accessory use. The term includes greenhouses, detached garages, sheds, gazebos, pool cabanas, and the like.

**Parking Requirements:** On-site parking is not required

**Supplemental Standards:**

- (a) Number and floor area. The number of residential accessory buildings and the floor area must comply with standards set forth in Appendix C – Zoning District Standards. In general 2 accessory buildings are allowed per property.
- (b) Exterior materials. Exterior materials for a residential accessory building with a floor area of more than 100 square feet (but not greenhouses) shall be the same as, substantially the same as, or complement those materials used on the principal building.



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**Residential Driveway Fact Sheet**

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**1) Driveway Quick Facts:**

- a) Driveway permits shall be obtained through the Engineering Department (715-421-8205), which includes new driveways, reconstructions, aprons, sidewalks, and other concrete work in the right-of-way. A plan shall accompany a permit application.
- b) A principal building (home) on a lot must be served by a driveway connected to a public street.
- c) Islands between driveway openings on the same lot must be at least 12 feet
- d) Openings for ingress and egress shall not exceed 30 feet. For duplexes and multifamily uses, openings shall not exceed 30 ft.
- e) Surfacing: driveways and related parking areas must be hard surfaced with asphalt, concrete, or pavers that provide the same structural support
- f) Setbacks: driveways and related parking areas must be setback at least 3 feet from side lot lines, with some exceptions (Zoning Code 11.00.05.c)
- g) Width: minimum width of a driveway is 10 feet. Maximum varies and is outlined in section 11.00.05.e of the Zoning Code. Engineering staff shall be contacted to review proposed driveway widths.

**2) Other Residential Parking Quick Facts:**

- a) An auxiliary parking bay may be located along the side of the garage, with the following requirements, see also page 2: (1) The parking bay must not be located in the front yard. (2) The parking bay must taper into the driveway. (3) The parking bay must be screened along the adjoining lot line. (4) The parking bay shall be unobscured. (5) The maximum width of the parking bay is 10 feet (6) The maximum length of the parking bay is 20 feet, not including the taper
- b) All motor vehicles must be placed within an enclosed building or on a driveway/parking bay
- c) No more than one recreational vehicle may be kept out of doors; one trailer is allowed with requirements listed in 11.00.07.d of the Zoning Code

# Planning & Zoning

## Planning and Zoning Data

Planning and Zoning activity has been strong and sustained after the economic closures and barriers associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Below is a table comparing planning requests since the pandemic:

### PLANNING REQUEST SUMMARY

REQUESTS	2020	2021	2022
Annexations/Detachments	1	1	0
Conditional Use Permits/Amendments	3	12	13
Ordinance Amendments	5	6	12
Rezoning	1	4	3
Special Requests (Signs, Etc.)	1	3	2
Site Plan/Landscaping/Parking Review	7	18	12
Subdivision/Land Division/Survey	7	16	15
Variances/Administrative Appeals	0	3	11
Other/Misc.	2	5	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>68</b>

Planning and Zoning requests rebounded substantially in 2021 and demonstrated sustained momentum through 2022. Site Plan Review, Surveys, and Conditional Use Permit applications comprised most of the applications in 2021. In 2022, applications were more varied. Most received applications included Surveys, Conditional Use Permits, Site Plan Reviews, and Ordinance Amendments. There was also a sharp uptick in Variances in 2022, and the Zoning Board of Appeals met in 7 of the 12 months. There was marked consistency in the number of applications received in 2021 and in 2022. In 2022, the land division process was streamlined by enabling certified survey maps to be approved internally. Therefore, requests for land division requests will likely diminish moving forward.

## Other Planning Projects

Below are summaries of other planning projects that were completed or are underway in the department.

- ❖ **Recovery and Redevelopment Plan** – The City has had continued advisement on the Recovery and Redevelopment Plan. The plan is being developed by Vandewalle and Associates in response to the mill closure. Throughout 2022, a Joint Common Council/Plan Commission Session was held in May and a Community Visioning workshop was held in June. A Wisconsin Rapids Forest Symposium was held in July. This first session included presentations by Scott Harrington, Vandewalle and Associates, and Eric Singaas, NRRI (National Resources Research Institute). The second session included research and innovative forest products. Over 50 individuals attended the event. The final Recovery and Redevelopment plan is expected in early 2023.



- ❖ **Wayfinding Signage Project** – In 2022 Phase I of the City’s wayfinding signage project was installed. A variety of sign types including pedestrian kiosks, trailhead signs, parking signs, were included. Phase II is in the final stages and should be complete in early 2023.



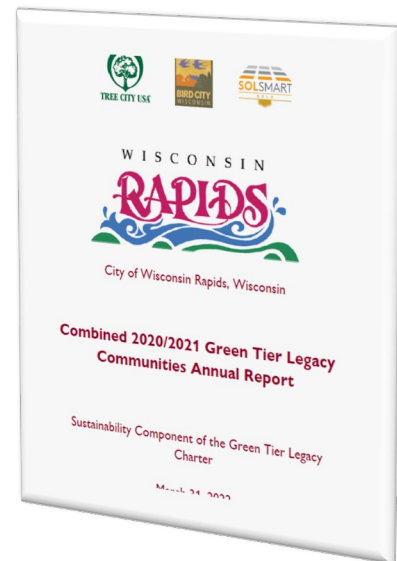
- ❖ **Public Art and Creative Placemaking Plan** – Springboarding from the UniverCity Year work that was done in 2020, the city began a strategic planning process for public art and creative placemaking in early 2022. [The Public Art and Creative Placemaking Plan](#) includes a public art inventory, siting preferences, and strategies for creating a public arts culture within the City of Wisconsin Rapids. An arts and cultural stakeholder group provided oversight on the creation of the plan. The process also included a digital survey and public workshop that was held in October of 2022. The final document is expected in early 2023.
- ❖ **Safe Routes Grant** – The City received grant funds from 1000 Friends of Wisconsin as the result of funding from the Center on Wisconsin Strategy (COWS). The grant was awarded to selected Green Tier Legacy Communities (GTLC). Staff worked with the Community Programs Director at 1000 Friends of Wisconsin to identify areas of concern and draft recommendations for infrastructure improvements to recreational locations within the city. The project culminated with a webinar in January 2023 in which City staff presented the results of the project.
- ❖ **Bicycle Friendly Community** – The City collaborated with local stakeholders to prepare submission of the City’s first ever Bicycle Friendly Community application to the League of American Bicyclists. Status as a bike friendly community builds upon our sense of place and can assist with marketing and attraction, while also cultivating efforts for improved bicycle facilities and programs. The application is slated to be submitted in February 2023.



- ❖ **Historic Preservation** – A comprehensive amendment to Chapter 31 Historic Preservation of the City’s Municipal Code was completed in November of 2022. This was done with the City’s intent to apply to become a Certified Local Government (CLG). The Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) administers the Certified Local Government program for the National Park Service in Wisconsin. CLG status will enable the City to qualify for grant funds and technical assistance and the eventual creation of historic districts, allowing city residents and businesses access to historic tax credits. CLG status is anticipated for early 2023, along with the first meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission.



- ❖ **Center for Land Use Education (CLUE) Training Opportunities** – The City organized regional training opportunities for Plan Commissioners and Zoning Board of Appeals Members that were facilitated by the Center for Land Use Education (CLUE). The Zoning Board of Appeals training was held in July of 2022 and the Plan Commissioner training was held in August of 2022. Both were graciously hosted at the Nekoosa Community Center.
- ❖ **Green Tier Legacy Community** – The City has had sustained engagement as a Green Tier Legacy Community through the Wisconsin DNR. Green Tier Legacy Communities (GTLC) exist to advance sustainable practices and collaborate on available resources and strategies. City staff attend quarterly meetings, and a 2020/2021 combined report was submitted in March of 2022.
- ❖ **Connect Community** – The City has remained an active participant in the WEDC Connect Communities program. This program allows the city to obtain technical assistance and explore available resources and program to advance downtown and commercial initiatives within the city.
- ❖ **Sign Code Rewrite** – A new sign code, assisted by the consultant Civi Tek, was adopted in 2021. Major changes incorporated include new trends in signage, temporary signs, and signs types. Additionally, the code was amended to include appropriate language to allow free speech signage and ensure content neutrality.



# Neighborhood Imp. / Code Enforcement

## Code Enforcement Data

Below is a table that outlines code enforcement cases in 2021 & 2022, with comparisons between years.

	2021	2022	# Change	% Change
<b>Exterior Property Area Complaints</b>				
Accumulation of Rubbish or Garbage	53	67	14	26%
Grass or Weeds	210	202	-8	-4%
Improper Parking of Vehicles	55	33	-22	-40%
Electronic Waste Violations	20	13	-7	-35%
Refuse or Refuse Carts on Curb	112	124	12	11%
Snow and Ice	131	101	-30	-23%
Recycling violation	185	177	-8	-4%
Impassable Sidewalk	11	12	1	9%
Leaves/yard waste	1	2	1	100%
Abandoned/Junk Vehicles	32	30	-2	-6%
Zoning Violation	14	6	-8	-57%
<b>Exterior Structure Complaints</b>				
Substandard Building, Fence, etc.	41	53	12	29%
Chickens / Coop	0	7	7	N/A
<b>Building Violations</b>				
Raze Order	0	3	3	N/A
Building Code violations	5	1	-4	-80%
Electrical Code violations	1	3	2	200%
Plumbing Code Violations	2	3	1	50%
Signs	4	2	-2	-50%
<b>Multiple Violations / General Case</b>				
Work without Permit	5	24	19	380%
Chronic nuisance	8	1	-7	-88%
Other	11	20	9	82%
<b>Written Warning</b>	53	35	-18	-34%
<b>Citations*</b>	33	39	6	18%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>987</b>	<b>958</b>		

Code enforcement data has remained steady over the last few years, averaging almost 1000 cases. Comparatively, totals for different case types also are consistent from year to year, with minor changes occurring and a few case types becoming a focus, such as “chickens” and work without of permit in 2022. Certain case types can also vary widely such as snow violations which are dependent upon the winter season. Moving forward, ‘building structure’ violations will be a higher priority for building inspectors, as well as rubbish and garbage violations. The Police Department (PD) will start to assist with rubbish and garbage violations in 2023 given the officers patrol of neighborhoods. Lastly, the citations shown are only for property maintenance violations and do not include building citations, which are rare.

## Other Neighborhood Improvement Initiatives

### ❖ Enforcement

Enforcement capabilities have increased with the recent purchase of two new tools within the department. A light intensity meter and sound level meter allow the department and PD to accurately respond to sound and light complaints. Sound complaints are received on a regular basis, and lighting level requirements exist within both the Zoning Code and Sign Code. Both devices have been used several times and will continue to be used for enforcement purposes.



### ❖ A Citizen's Guide to City Codes

The Citizen's Guide to City Codes was created to inform citizens about City codes and policies related to exterior maintenance, garbage and recycling, occupancy, fire safety, police safety, parking, tenant renter resources, pet ownership, and permitting. This resource was shared with various businesses, realtors, and landlord organizations throughout the city and is available at the Community Development Department and on the Department website. Successful educational practices are essential to effective code enforcement within the City, and this brochure provides one way to connect the public to available policies and resources.

The image displays three brochures from the City of Wisconsin Rapids. The leftmost brochure is titled 'Garbage and Recycling Rules' and contains sections for Garbage Guidelines, Recycling Guidelines, Collection Services, Cart Placement, and Cart Information. The middle brochure is titled 'Occupancy/General' and contains sections for Occupancy and Licensing, Fire Safety, and Police Department. The rightmost brochure is titled 'City of Wisconsin Rapids A Citizen's Guide to City Codes' and includes a 'SeeClickFix' logo and a photograph of a house.