



CITY OF GRAND HAVEN

Press Release



Figure 1: pre-coal pile clean up

Grand Haven Awarded APWA “Project of the Year” Award for Harbor Island Work

The Distinction Honors the Project’s Management, Administration and Implementation.

Grand Haven, MI, [January 29, 2026] - The City of Grand Haven is honored to announce that the work done to support Harbor Island’s coal yard closure has been

recognized by the Midwest Branch, Michigan Chapter of the American Public Works Association (APWA) as its Project of the Year. This award recognizes the City’s commitment to sustainable infrastructure through its innovative, low-impact approach to restoring the environmental integrity of Harbor Island, eliminating the need for energy-intensive dewatering and treatment of potentially per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) impacted water, reducing environmental disturbance, and saving up to \$1 million.

“We are proud to be recognized by the APWA for the positive transformative effect this project has had for our community,” said Derek Gadjos, Grand Haven Project Management Director. “Working with our community, Harbor Island is projected to be a part of Grand Haven that we can all be proud of. Earning this award validates the work we’ve done and empowers us to continue forward with the community at our side.”



Figure 2: post-coal pile clean up

For over a century, Harbor Island has been used for industrial purposes and waste disposal, making the site uniquely complex from a contamination perspective. Located on the Grand River, innovative techniques to control groundwater levels and highly variable treatment costs were necessary. Weekly meetings held with the City and environmental consulting firm HDR, as well as quarterly meetings with a Community Advisory Group, all helped ensure close coordination to proactively manage potential issues, changes and concerns. Similarly, safety coordination meetings were conducted daily during on-site visits to promote timely identification of hazards. These proactive administrative approaches resulted in continuous progression achieved without a safety incident.

“Innovation is at the heart of our work at HDR, and this project is a testament to what can be achieved through creative, collaborative problem-solving,” said Lara Zawaideh, HDR Project Manager for Grand Haven. “Grand Haven has been an exceptional partner, and our shared commitment to developing forward-thinking solutions is a key reason for our successes and why this project was selected by APWA as Project of the Year.”

The award also acknowledges the exemplary project team members, including the staff of the Grand Haven Board of Light and Power. Those team members facilitated quick, cost effective and adaptive remediation strategies which allowed the project to be completed without delays or cost overruns.

Additionally, the award recognizes Grand Haven’s intentional work with the community. Along with the quarterly Community Advisory Meetings and updates, the City has also held three public Town Hall events to keep stakeholders informed and engaged, as well as visioning charettes to solicit feedback from residents as to the future of the Island. This approach has created a partnership with the community where everyone has a stake in the future of Harbor Island.

To learn more about the project and Harbor Island, visit www.renewharborisland.org. The site includes links to historical data, official reports and resources, project timelines and contact information.