

# Michigan Association of Planning

## Master Planning

### Why Prepare a Master Plan?

A community without a master plan must react to individual development proposals without a game plan. A comprehensive plan can help give answers to questions such as:

- What do the residents, business owners, and community officials most value and want?
- How much single family, multiple family, commercial, or industrial land use should we have?
- Where should it go?
- How intense should it be?
- What will be the impact on the environment?
- Can the land or utility system support the land uses?
- Can the road system handle it? If not, what improvements are needed and when?
- Should spot uses be allowed to remain in the future or gradually eliminated removed?
- What is planned by adjacent communities and agencies with jurisdiction within your community?
- What changes are needed to regulations, procedures, or community facilities and services to improve the community in the future?
- What considerations should be made to prepare for a new economy and stabilization in times of economic change?

**Plan Timeframe.** The plan is intended to be long range, as the planning acts require planning for the next 20 years. Because it is difficult to predict beyond a few years, many plans include specific short-term recommendations, with more general or flexible guidelines farther into the future. Some communities can use the plan for a relatively long period of time, while others, particularly those facing growth pressures, may need to update their plan more frequently. Some communities update various elements of the plan on a more frequent basis to respond to new information or issues.

**Legal Basis for Zoning.** State law (M.C.L. 125.3101 *et seq.* and specifically M.C.L. 125.3203) requires that communities have a “basic plan” as the foundation for, and to legitimize, the zoning

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ordinance and other regulations that shape the physical and social development of the community. The lack of an up-to-date master plan makes it more difficult to defend decisions.

**Guides Land Use Decisions.** Recommendations in the master plan can be used to guide decisions on zoning or changes to land use. Consistent use of the plan to support decisions improves credibility with the public. Residents and landowners can see that decisions have a basis and are not just made randomly. Zoning decisions that consistently use a well-prepared plan can also increase likelihood of support by the courts in litigation.

**Guides Decisions on Changes to Regulations and Improvements to Public Facilities and Services.** Recommendations in the master plan, in the form of goals, objectives, strategies, methods, and policy, can be used to guide community decisions on changes to regulations, such as the zoning ordinance, sign, or subdivision/land division ordinances. The plan may also recommend certain improvements to roads, utilities, parks, and community facilities (city hall, library, police or fire stations, etc.). Many projects identified in the Master Plan will be included in the community's Capital Improvements Plan.

**Provides Support and Improves Funding Eligibility for Projects.** The planning process usually identifies a number of projects for which funding is needed. In some cases, identification helps build community support for local funding, such as through a special millage or special assessment. In other cases, the likelihood for county, state, or federal funding participation is increased through their inclusion in the planning process. For example, Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) funding requires the parks and recreation plan be no more than five years old. Required studies for federally funded projects include a review of the local plans. In still other cases, foundations or civic groups have rallied support for projects first identified through the planning process.

### Why do we Plan?

- Anticipate change
- Ensure wise use of resources
- Protect our environment
- Preserve our quality of life
- Keep strong neighborhoods
- Foster new development

