



LSL Planning, Inc.
Community Planning Consultants

Planning for your Community during Slow Economic Times: The Time is NOW!

As everyone living in this great State is aware, Michigan's economy is amidst a substantial downturn. Development applications are few, which for many communities has led to short planning commission meetings. Some communities have resorted to canceling planning commission meetings as there was no new business.

During the economic boom of the 1990's there were complaints that planning commissions were unable to do any "real" planning because their meetings were filled with "reactive planning," reviewing applications brought forth by developers. Although no one is celebrating our current economic woes, there is a silver lining from a planning perspective! Planning commissions now have the opportunity to plan for the future of their communities, to be prepared for the return of economic prosperity and the days when meetings will be consumed by review of development activities. Instead of canceling the next planning commission meeting we challenge you to use this time to take on those planning activities that there was not time for in the past.

Michigan Zoning Enabling Act and the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. The recently enacted Michigan Zoning Enabling Act and the Michigan Planning Enabling Act will affect how communities conduct their planning activities. Your LSL planner can give a quick review of the act changes at a planning commission meeting and we can assist you in amending your planning documents to conform to these acts.

Update Your Master Plan. Your master plan is the most important planning document since it offers guidance on your community's future. Remember, the plan is supposed to be updated every 5 years under state law. If your plan is out-of-date, carry out a complete review of the plan, identify necessary changes and update it. If the plan is not out of date, you may want to strengthen your existing strategies.

Update Other Policy Documents. Do you have other planning policy documents that have not been updated recently? How old is your park and recreation master plan, pathway plan, sub-area or neighborhood plan, economic development strategy, or your downtown master plan? Your community's ability to obtain grants or other funding sources often depends on having current plans.



Activities your Community should be considering NOW....

- Review your ZBA and PC bylaws, do your procedures reflect recent changes in state law—do they refer to the right state laws?
- Review submittal materials for improvements, streamline applications, develop or update community educational materials, checklists, etc.
- Update or create some useful maps or materials to promote your community.
- Update your land use or housing condition survey.
- Identify a special project of interest to the community such as developing greenways or improving a particular corridor.
- Hold a joint strategic planning meeting with your boards and commissions to revisit and solidify your existing master plan.
- Hold a joint planning meeting with neighboring communities to share ideas and concerns.
- Engage in an in-depth review of the zoning ordinance, is it compliant with state law, does it reflect new case law? Does it really help implement the plan?



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Do you have a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to assist in budgeting of projects so local finances are used most efficiently? All city and village planning commissions are required to annually adopt a CIP, and the new consolidated Planning Enabling Act will require the planning commission of any township that operates a water or sewer utility to adopt a CIP.

Update Your Development Regulations. Does your zoning ordinance implement the vision set forth in your master plan? Does it address emerging issues such as alternative energy facilities and wireless telecommunication facilities? Is it up-to-date regarding issues like signs, adult and child care facilities, lighting, parking, home occupations, storm water management and other issues? Perhaps new zoning techniques, such as form-based zoning would meet your changing development needs. LSL has been at the forefront of developing and implementing the latest, cutting edge planning and zoning techniques.

Economic Development. Given the slow economic times, there can be added pressure to “accept anything” or lower the community’s expectations. However, there are some things a community can do to help stimulate desired development without compromising quality. You may want to extend the site plan approval period beyond the typical one year, streamline the approval process, relax overly restrictive standards or give incentives for well designed development.

Training. When was the last time your planning commission, ZBA or legislative body underwent a training session? Each of these groups spends countless hours serving the community. It is important that they are equipped with the information to do their jobs efficiently and effectively.

So, before you cancel your next planning commission meeting because of a “lack of agenda items,” think about what you can do to proactively prepare for your community’s future.

Please contact LSL Planning or talk to your LSL planner about the planning activities your community would like to undertake to prepare for Michigan’s future economic prosperity.

Training Offered by LSL

- Basic Planning & Zoning
- Open Space Residential Zoning
- Zoning Board of Appeals
- Community Design Standards
- Downtown Improvement Funding
- Walkable Community Strategies
- Minimizing the Risk of Litigation
- Running Successful Meetings
- Site Plan Review
- Managing Traffic in Your Community
- Planned Unit Developments
- Traffic Calming
- Access Management
- Evaluation of Traffic Impact Studies
- Long Range Transportation Planning

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