

  
**MSU**  
**CITIZEN PLANNER PROGRAM**  




Complements MSU Citizen Planner Program

**INSIDE**

**Case Summary, Marc Daneman, 2**

**MSU'S Citizen Planner Program: 15 Years of Successfully Educating Michigan Land Use Decision Makers, Dean Solomon and Glenn Pape, 3-7**

**The Master Citizen Planner Credential and Online Course: Impacts Beyond the Classroom, Wayne Beyea, Patricia Crawford, Rohit Menon, and Brad Neumann 8-9**

**Citizen Planner Helps Manistee Planners Address Controversial Issues, Kurt H. Schindler, 10**

**Citizen Planner's Journey: From Villiage Planning Commission Member to Township Planner, Kurt H. Schindler, 10-11**

**Jobs Available, 11**

**Planning & Zoning Essentials - 3 Locations, Backcover**

**Calendar, Backcover**

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# MSU'S CITIZEN PLANNER PROGRAM: 15 Years of Successfully Educating Michigan Land Use Decision Makers

By Dean Solomon and Glenn Pape, MSU Extension

Michigan has over 18,000 appointed and 8,500 elected local officials who have local land use decision making roles; this is more than in most other states. This list includes planning commissioners, zoning board of appeals members, elected township, city, village and county boards, as well as staff including zoning administrators and municipal planners. With average tenure of appointed officials between 3-4 years, this pool is also constantly changing. Statewide organizations and educational institutions have long been challenged to provide effective training for this large group of local leaders that is continuously in flux.

Most local officials enter their roles with varied life experiences, mixed skill sets and great commitment to their communities, but little background in the fundamentals of planning and zoning, let alone the nuances of many legal issues and best practices. It makes common sense that better training of local officials can yield more effective land use decisions. There is growing evidence that this is true as well.

One of MSU Extension's responses to this challenge is the Citizen Planner Program, our marquee land use education effort. This article and three accompanying ones review the Citizen Planner Program's history, impacts and future direction.

A Citizen Planner Program strategic plan developed in 2002 identified the following program goals:

- Improve land use decision making
- Increase awareness of existing land use tools
- Provide locally focused, current, and on-going land use education
- Nurture alumni to promote "good practices" in land use
- Increase length of time served on local boards and commissions
- Increase satisfaction of serving on local boards and commissions
- Improve continuity/institutional memory at the local level regarding land use and decisions
- Enhance the understanding and responsibility of local officials in relation to ethics and conflict of interest issues
- Improve working relationships and citizen involvement within and among communities
- Reduce local litigation and liability through improved risk management practices.

## Program History

The idea for the Citizen Planner Program arose in the late 1990s amid grow-

ing concerns about land use development patterns and their impacts on Michigan's environment and economy. Earlier in that decade the **Michigan Environmental and Relative Risk Assessment**<sup>1</sup> identified "absence of land use planning that considers resources and the integrity of ecosystems" as among the most critical environmental issues facing the state. **Michigan's Trend Future**<sup>2</sup> reports built a compelling case that current land use patterns, if unabated, would impact infrastructure costs, threaten viability of urban areas, lead to job loss in resource-based industries, and lessen tourism opportunities. Sprawl was the operative term.

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***"... Extremely well prepared program presented by knowledgeable and approachable professionals. I would highly recommend this to anyone on a planning board." 2013 Citizen Planner Participant***

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These trends were especially evident in the Grand Traverse Bay region. Concerns about rapid growth and the impact on natural resources led to the development in 1992 of the **Grand Traverse Bay Region Development Guide Book**.<sup>3</sup> This excellent resource, developed through efforts of many regional stakeholders and prepared by the Planning and Zoning Center, included design guidelines and associated regulatory options to better manage the region's rapid growth.

There was a problem. Although the document was widely distributed and promoted, relatively few of the recommended practices were implemented in the years following publication. During 1995, a committee facilitated by the Traverse Area Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Charities looked into the question of what could be done to increase use of the guidebook. As part of that process, Jim Wiesing, Grand Traverse County Extension Director (now retired), conducted a survey of over 600 local planning and zoning officials to learn more about their skills, motivations and training interests.

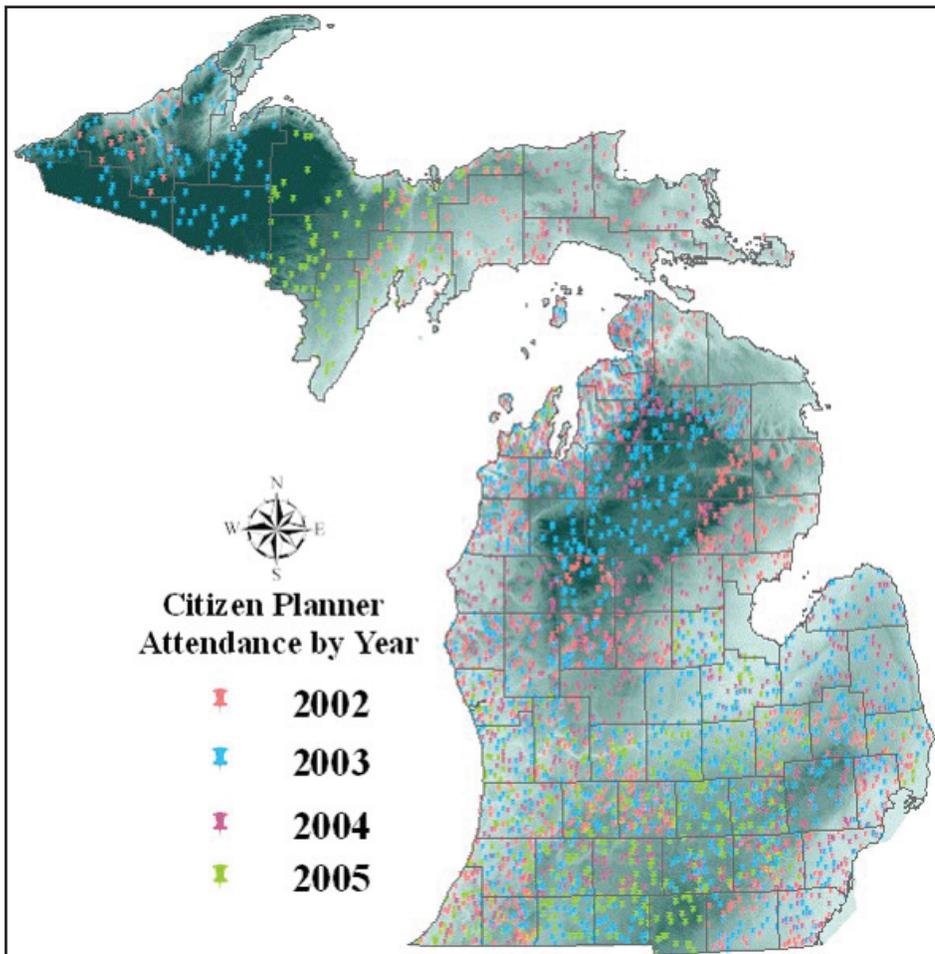
Wiesing's study showed that local official's background and basic understanding of planning and zoning were major impediments to use of the guidebook. He found that most planning officials in the region were appointed with no prior background, little understanding of their roles,

and no training upon being elected or appointed. He concluded that local officials, for the most part, did not have the training or expertise to implement the techniques advocated in the guidebook. Not a surprising result — a prerequisite for implementing innovative techniques is a grasp of the planning basics — the legal framework for planning and zoning, basic techniques and community engagement methods. How, for instance, could a planning commission propose conservation design standards without an understanding of the difference between a land division, subdivision, site-condominium and PUD?

While one-day or part-day basic training opportunities were available from statewide and regional organizations, they often involved substantial travel and expense — a price communities were not always willing to pay. Survey respondents said that they would attend training if it was offered locally, was reasonably priced, and could be completed in a relatively short amount of time.

These factors led to the creation of the Citizen Planner Pilot Program in 2000. With funding assistance from Rotary Charities and the Traverse Area Chamber Foundation, a team of MSU Extension Educators developed a six-session classroom based program for elected and appointed officials, with two of the sessions including the Michigan Society of Planning Officials (now Michigan Association of Planning) *Planning and Zoning Essentials* curriculum. That basic content was complemented with additional sessions addressing plan implementation techniques, innovative methods and, very importantly, the art of community planning — the process skills to function successfully as a board and engage residents.

The first pilot programs offered in Kalkaska and four other locations in northwest Lower Michigan attracted 256 persons and were well-regarded by participants. From there, the program expanded and attracted growing interest in other parts of the state. Based on those successes, MSU Extension, through funding from the People and Land Program — W.K. Kellogg Foundation and MSU, hired a statewide coordinator and expanded the program to a statewide effort in 2002, focusing on delivering the core series. During this roll out period 53 programs were offered across the state with 2,073 participants from 79 counties. Michigan was developing rapidly during this period and there was a pent up demand for this type of training giving officials the skills and tools needed. Map 1 shows the distribution of the participants



Citizen Planner Attendance (indicated by dots) during the early years of the statewide program.

by year and location over the first four years of the statewide program.

The Citizen Planner Program entered a new phase in 2006 with a focus on a different product suite. Having completed an administrative move to become part of the new Land Policy Institute at MSU, Citizen Planner created an expanded course offering building on the successful classroom program. Citizen Planner Online was developed and launched after a successful pilot. Master Citizen Planner courses were developed and offered building on the content introduced in the core series. The core series was offered in classroom programs in 39 locations during 2006-2009 with a participation of 1,119 planning officials. It was during this phase that Citizen Planner began repeating training by returning to locations that had already hosted the program once or twice before.

Municipal training budgets were greatly reduced during and after the 2007-2009 recession and at the same time Michigan State University Extension began a structural reorganization. Citizen Planner transitioned from campus administration to a field work team in 2012 and the program underwent a significant content update at that time.

Since its inception, over 4,000 local leaders have participated in the Citizen Planner core course, making it one of the leading locally-focused land use training programs in the nation.

### Citizen Planner Classroom Program

The current version of the Citizen Planner classroom-based program is most typically a series of seven consecutive weekly, three-hour evening sessions, totaling 21 hours of instructional time. MSU Land Use Educators, and occasionally other land use professionals, teach the following topics:

- 1. Introduction to Planning and Zoning:** Smart Growth, Placemaking and the New Economy, Conflict of Interest and Planning Resources
- 2. Legal Foundations of Planning and Zoning:** Cases, Statutes and other Planning Authority
- 3. Roles and Responsibilities, Part I:** Master Plan and Planning Process, Sub-Area Plans, and Working with the Public
- 4. Roles and Responsibilities, Part II:** Zoning, Site Plans and Zoning Board of Appeals Process
- 5. Plan Implementation and Develop-**

**ment Controls:** Subdividing Land, Zoning Controls and Non-Regulatory Techniques

**6. Innovative Planning and Zoning:** Green Development, Form-Based Code, Traditional Neighborhood Design and Conservation Design

**7. The Art of Community Planning:** Participation, Effective Meetings and Managing Conflict

Participants also receive a spiral-bound Citizen Planner manual that includes short chapters for each of the seven sessions, PowerPoint slide handouts and references. At the conclusion of the program, participants receive a certificate of completion. Graduates may choose to go one step further and complete additional requirements to become a Master Citizen Planner (see accompanying article). The seven-week course requires significant personal commitment to attend and read the course materials. Over the years, though, most participants have stuck with it and completed the program.

### Spartville

During the first several years as a statewide program, feedback from Citizen Planner graduates was very positive. One clear message, though: two to two and a half hours of straight lecture was too much, and there was not enough time to interact with and learn from other participants. The challenge was to incorporate activities within the program that were a balance between longer sessions and reduced the amount of lecturing, while helping participants apply their new knowledge and learn from their peers to address real-world problems.

The MSU Extension team's response was to develop, in cooperation with the Small Town Design Initiative within MSU Landscape Architecture program, the innovative Spartville exercises. These were added to the classroom program in 2005.

Spartville is a fictional Michigan place designed specifically for the Citizen Planner Program. There is a cast of Characters – Rick Belding, the businessman who wants to develop a new gravel mine; Ruth Johnson, a zoning board of appeals (ZBA) member and historical society past-president; Larry Bingham, the farmer concerned about development around his land; Mary Rodriguez, the planning commission chairperson, and many others. Spartville is neither a city nor township, rather it is a fictional place with both urban and rural areas, bisected by the Green River.

Although none of the characters or places are real, the situations are similar to day-to-day issues local planning officials may face. In one exercise, for example, the Spartville Planning Commission is considering a gravel mine request – all of the characters have some relationship



Kent County Citizen Planner Graduates in 2001, one of the first years of the program.

to one another and one of the tasks of the Citizen Planner participants is to figure out who may or may not have a conflict of interest. In another fun instructive exercise, participants review a site plan for a Spartyville Burger Barn. The examples are drawn from real projects with some alterations to create obvious and not-so-obvious design problems or impacts on abutting properties.

Each exercise is presented on a ledger-sized sheet that includes a short description of the situation, questions to answer, pictures of the characters, maps and diagrams. Each exercise is designed for groups of three to four to read, discuss and reach conclusions within a 30-minute time block during each of the seven Citizen Planner units. For many units, both urban and rural scenarios are included – instructors can choose one or both, depending on the characteristics of the group. The scenarios are simple enough to be understood during the allotted time, yet suitably ambiguous so that there is opportunity for active participant discussion.

Since its introduction, the Spartyville exercises have consistently been one of the most popular Citizen Planner elements. Participants quickly get into the spirit of the activities and engage in active discussions. These experiences emphasize the advantage of providing opportunities for participants in all land use education programs, not just Citizen Planner, to have a break from expert presentations, to interact and learn from each other, and have fun. MSU Extension land use educators now routinely incorporate this type of interaction in many of their workshops.

More importantly, the Spartyville exercises incorporate experiential learning into the program. Adults learn in different ways, and the idea was to have Citizen Planner programs provide several learning techniques in each session that correspond to each participant's dominant learning style.

### The Need for Varied Approaches

The Citizen Planner classroom pro-

gram, including Spartyville, continues to be popular, with peaks and valleys in year-to-year participation influenced by the economy and local government resources. Sitting in a classroom an evening per week for seven weeks, though, is not a practical approach in all communities and for all local officials.

First, Citizen Planner requires a minimum enrollment of approximately 20 individuals in order to cover travel, materials, facility and other costs. Because of this requirement and a limited instructor pool, the course is offered only periodically in any one area, and it is a struggle in some parts of the state to gather enough participants to host a program at all.

Second, as noted above, adults vary in their preferred way of learning. For some, it's listening to and watching an expert, while others prefer to read about a topic at their own pace. Some appointed or elected officials simply do not have the time or availability to attend another meeting.

To explore opportunities for broadening education and training opportunities, MSU conducted a survey of local officials, and hosted focus group sessions in 2004<sup>4</sup> to learn about information needs, preferred training formats and demand for an online program of study. One of the survey and focus group results indicated that, although planning officials were most comfortable with face-to-face training and independent study, more than one-half

said that they would be comfortable with an instructor-led online format. (This study includes a lot of other information about planning officials' attitudes and preferences – a worthwhile reference even now, a decade after the research was conducted. It is available at <http://lu.msue.msu.edu/pamphlet/Bres/RR574.pdf>.)

Informed by that study, Citizen Planner is now offered in two other formats, Citizen Planner Online and Citizen Planner on the Web, making the program more available to communities and individuals around the state.

### Citizen Planner Online

Between 2005 and 2007, with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Citizen Planner team developed an online version of the program, available 24/7 for Michigan residents. Online learning is a very different experience from classroom-based instruction, so the structure of this version was modified to fit the medium. Enrollees can choose among seven modules with four to eight separate units within each module. Participants read information on a series of pages, and can download additional information for reviewing at a convenient time. A quiz at the end of each unit reinforces learning. Although each unit can be purchased separately, most participants enroll for the entire certificate course. Just as with the classroom program, graduates can opt to continue on to become a Master Citizen Planner.

The web-based course is more intensive, giving participants the opportunity to complete both required and optional readings. Since the online course was piloted in 2006, enrollees report that finishing all of the online modules required to earn a completion certificate takes around 40 hours. Reviews are positive, with graduates reporting that they liked the conve-

Citizen Planner Online example screen. The course will be moving to the national eXtension platform in 2015.

nience and ability to go through the content at their own pace. Approximately 900 individuals have completed the online course since 2006.

The Citizen Planner Online program was one of the early attempts, nationally, to offer comprehensive web-based planning and zoning training for local appointed and elected officials. Other state Extension services began inquiring about the Michigan model, leading to the launch of the American Citizen Planner Program (<http://americancitizenplanner.com>). This effort established partnerships with several educational institutions around the United States to offer a national version of portions of the Citizen Planner curriculum, customized to meet needs within each partner state. (See, for example, the Arizona Citizen Planner 101 program, <https://extension.arizona.edu/arizona-citizen-planner-101>.)

The Citizen Planner Online program is currently enjoying somewhat of a sabbatical, and is unavailable for new sign-ups while the Citizen Planner Team moves it to a new online course delivery technology and updates the content and learning tools. The course will be re-launched in mid-2015.

the program via MSU's Adobe Connect® video conferencing system. Participants can see the PowerPoint presentations and hear the speaker, ask questions and interact with one another. Pilot program survey respondents enjoyed the convenience and reduced travel, indicating that the program was as good or better than other workshops they attended that **did not** use this technology. The approach is especially successful in the Upper Peninsula, where long travel distances are a significant challenge.

New videoconferencing technology used by MSU Extension since 2014 solves common complaints about sound quality during discussions and the inability to see the speaker.

### Junior Citizen Planner Curriculum

The planners of tomorrow are youth today, and engaging elementary and middle school kids in understanding land use issues is a valuable way to build civic skills for the future. Junior Citizen Planner (JCP) was developed in the early 2000s in partnership with the MSU Extension 4-H Youth Development program, adapted from the United Growth for Kent County *This Land is Your Land* curriculum (<http://www.unitedgrowth.org/>).

available for free download at [http://4h.msue.msu.edu/resources/junior\\_citizen\\_planner\\_curriculum1](http://4h.msue.msu.edu/resources/junior_citizen_planner_curriculum1). Also available on the same site is the very good *Safe Routes 2 School Make Trax* curriculum that is now incorporated into JCP.

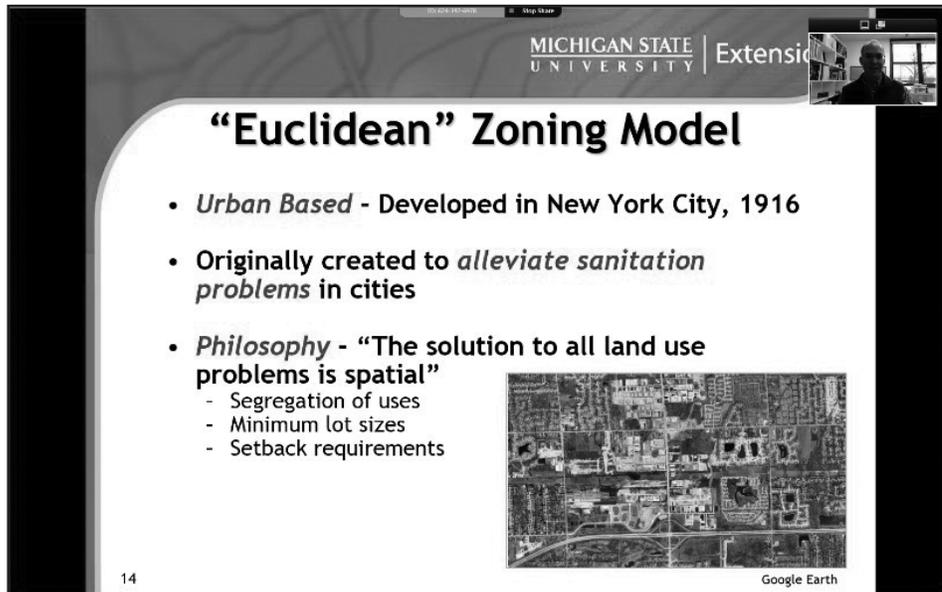
### CPP as a Prerequisite to the Zoning Administrator Certificate Program

In 2009, the Planning & Zoning Center at MSU began offering once or twice annually, a Zoning Administrator Certificate Program (ZACP). This eight-module program has 24 hours of instruction over a three-day period, or alternatively, one full day of instruction, for four weeks in a row. The location of the training is moved across the state over time. Participants take a written, open book exam at the end of the training. However, they cannot receive a certificate for the course unless they also complete the Citizen Planner Program (either in the classroom or online). It is highly recommended that participants complete the CPP before taking the ZA training, but it is not required. Some experienced professional planners with credentials from the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) can “comp” out of the CPP, but only a small percent of the zoning administrators who participate fall into this category. Most experienced zoning administrators grumble about this requirement, some fairly loudly, but nearly all express gratitude afterwards for having to go through the CPP classes. They say that CPP classes provide them with useful basic information, a common language that is used throughout the ZACP, and a better understanding of the job and role of planning commissioners, and local elected officials.

### The Value of Partnerships

MSU Extension is among many organizations in the state who provide education and services to local planning officials. Working together to provide a range of training options, and being careful to play to each other's strengths is an important factor in the success of all programs, including Citizen Planner.

Early in the program, as mentioned above, MSU Extension licensed the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP) curriculum for two of the Citizen Planner Sessions, and yearly presents the entire 7-module Citizen Planner course during the MAP annual conference. Representatives from the Michigan Townships Association (MTA), Michigan Association of Counties (MAC), Michigan Municipal League (MML) and other organizations have served on Citizen Planner advisory committees and also helped to promote the program. The Master Citizen Planner Program (MCP) also promotes educational opportunities offered by other organizations to our graduates seeking MCP credit.



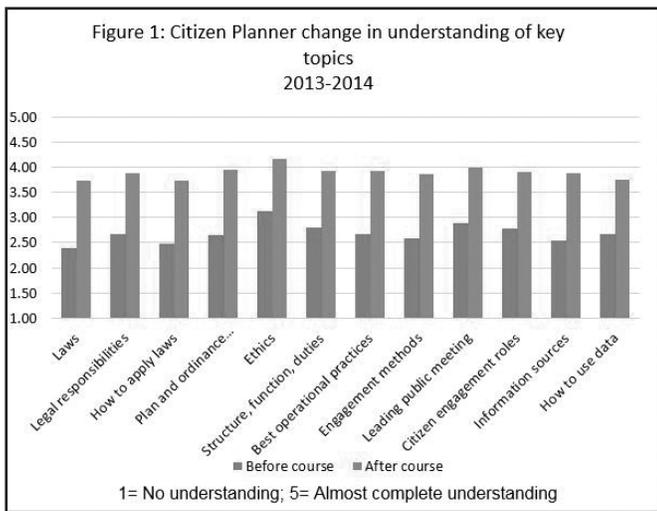
How the 2015 Citizen Planner on the Web program appears to viewers. Participants can see and hear the presenter, and see the PowerPoint presentation.

### Citizen Planner via the Web

Online learning is a great alternative for individuals comfortable with technology, motivated and self-disciplined to complete the program. This alternative is not perfect for all local officials, and despite availability of the online program, portions of the state were still underserved. With rapidly evolving videoconferencing technology, a third option for taking the Citizen Planner program was piloted in 2011, Citizen Planner on the Web. This option allows small groups of five or more at several locations around the state to participate in

Interactive group activities target youth in 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grades and can be used in the classroom, after-school programs, home schools, 4-H clubs, and other day and summer camp programs. Youth learn skills to become good citizens and decision makers through fun and creative activities – from mapping your neighborhood and exploring changes to conducting a mock public hearing. Early on, adult Citizen Planner program graduates were encouraged to teach the curriculum in cooperation with local schools.

The JCP curriculum and materials are

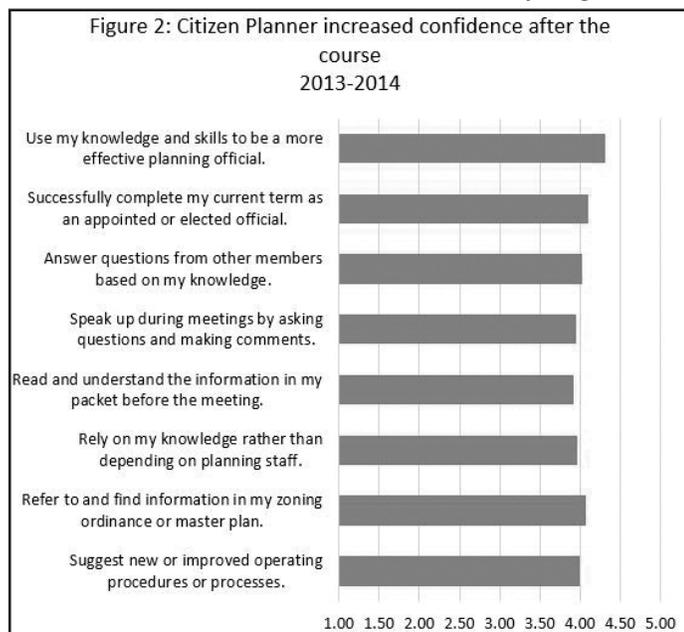


### Program Impact

MSU Extension has been collecting evaluation data since the beginning of the program. Recent data from 2013 and 2014 (n=188) shows that participants report increased knowledge of planning and zoning and confidence to apply those skills in their local communities. For example, participants reported that they:

- Significantly increased their knowledge in all of the 12 basic knowledge categories surveyed (Figure 1)
- Increased their confidence to actively contribute and be more effective in their planning and zoning roles (Figure 2)
- Plan to use the information in many ways – including, for example, more actively participating in local plan and ordinance development, changing review procedures, being more prepared for meetings, and encouraging public participation at meetings.

Although the above evaluation data is a recent example, knowledge gain and confidence data has been very consistently



positive since the program's beginning.

MSU Extension and the MSU School of Planning, Design and Construction are currently in the middle of a study to gauge longer-term Citizen Planner impacts on individual program participants, their board or commission and their communities. This effort includes two focus group sessions to learn from both participants and other community leaders (who did not attend Citizen Planner but were able to observe changes from people who did) about the program's ripple effects, and an online survey to quantify objective measures of program impacts. The results from that study will be available in Spring 2015 (and will be reported in *Planning and Zoning News*).

See the accompanying article about the Master Citizen Planner program to learn about the capstone projects participants have completed.

### Staying Connected with Citizen Planner Advanced Academy

Continuing to engage Citizen Planner Program graduates after they complete the core course is an important program goal. Laws, regulations and current approaches are always changing, and thus the need to keep Citizen Planners involved with their fellow graduates, with MSU and with other organizations. MSU Extension continues this educational process by regularly communicating via an e-newsletter, Facebook page, and Twitter feed.

In addition to the Master Citizen Planner Program, MSU Extension hosts an annual day-long Citizen Planner Advanced Acad-

emy. Over the years, participants have heard presentations during that event on advanced topics ranging from wind energy to placemaking. Like any MSU Extension program, this event is open for anyone to attend, not just Citizen Planner participants.

### What's Next?

The Citizen Planner Program team strives to keep the program useful, relevant and engaging. Although there is a constant stream of new planning officials who would benefit from the course, MSU Extension continues to

innovate to expand basic and advanced training opportunities. Among our goals in the next couple of years are to:

- Update and incorporate video and new learning tools into the Citizen Planner Online program.
- Continue to experiment with rapidly-evolving video technology to bring the Citizen Planner program to underserved communities in the state.
- Build connections between Citizen Planner graduates through social media, web sites, meetings, and active membership in MAP, MTA, MAC, MML and other organizations.
- Increase opportunities for short, informative webinars to keep Citizen Planners current on the latest planning news.
- Continue to provide local face-to-face training with existing programs and new topics.
- Build interest and capacity among other land use professionals to serve as Citizen Planner instructors.
- Enhance the Master Citizen Planner credential and online continuing education opportunities through the national eXtension network.

### How to Find Us

For more information about the Citizen Planner Program contact: Janean Danca at the Citizen Planner Office, 269-657-8213; email [cpplanner@msu.edu](mailto:cpplanner@msu.edu) [www.citizenplanner.msu.edu](http://www.citizenplanner.msu.edu) <https://www.facebook.com/pages/MSU-Michigan-Citizen-Planner/146664335394140> Twitter: @CplannerMSU

Connect with individual MSU Land Use Educators at: [http://msue.anr.msu.edu/program/info/land\\_use\\_education\\_services](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/program/info/land_use_education_services).

### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Rustem, William R. (editor); **Michigan's Environment and Relative Risk Assessment**; Public Sector Consultants for Michigan Department of Natural Resources; 1992.
- 2 Wyckoff, Mark A., principal investigator; **Michigan's Trend Future** (11 volumes); Planning & Zoning Center, Inc. for Michigan Society of Planning Officials (now Michigan Association of Planning); August 1995.
- 3 Warbach, John W. and Wyckoff, Mark A.; **Grand Traverse Bay Region Development Guide Book**; Planning and Zoning Center, Inc.; 1992.
- 4 Cullen, A., Norris, P., Beyea, W., Geith, C., & Rhead, G. (April 2006). *Expanding Education and Training Opportunities for Michigan Local Government Land Use Planning Officials*. **Research Report 574**. Michigan State University.

# THE MASTER CITIZEN PLANNER CREDENTIAL AND ONLINE COURSE: Impacts Beyond the Classroom

By **Wayne Beyea, J.D., AICP**, MSU School of Planning, Design and Construction (SPDC);

**Patricia Crawford, PhD, SPDC; Rohit Menon, Graduate Student, SPDC; Brad Neumann, AICP, MSU Extension**

Since 2006 planning officials throughout the state of Michigan who complete the Citizen Planner Program either in a classroom setting or online have had the option to become a Master Citizen Planner (MCP). The MCP credentialing program was developed to provide advanced skill development and a benchmark for continuing education for Michigan elected and appointed officials and citizen volunteers. Today, the MCP credential is recognized and respected in the planning and zoning profession as the standard of excellence for individual achievement and a foundational level of knowledge for citizen planners. The MCP and related online program have received national recognition. Citizen planners from around the nation will be able to enroll in online modules and take a national MCP exam through the USDA Cooperative Extension eXtension network beginning in 2015.

Numerous statewide groups, including governmental associations and municipal insurance companies, support the Master Citizen Planner program and encourage their members to pursue the MCP credential. Completion of the Citizen Planner program, and the continuing education classes that must be taken thereafter, provide measurable impacts to municipalities throughout Michigan.

MCP graduates have demonstrated their ability to facilitate and lead sustained planning efforts in their respective communities. Literature on sustained public participation in urban planning suggest to properly engage a population that can and will be invested in an area, it is important to involve them “early, often and [be] on going” (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000, 103).

## The MCP Credential

The MCP credential requires completion of the seven-session Citizen Planner program, passing an online examination at a rate of 70 percent or higher, completing a capstone project, and meeting continuing education requirements. The exam is administered online as part of Michigan State University’s web-based online course platform. The capstone component is the “transformational education” aspect of the program. The capstone projects involve time outside the classroom to create measurable impacts and outcomes.

Master Citizen Planners meet continuing education requirements by logging at least six hours of training annually to

keep the MCP credential. Participants can meet the education requirement by enrolling in MCP-approved courses available throughout the year. Approved training is offered by MSU Extension and partnering organizations. If a MCP certificate holder fails to meet the continuing education requirement, MCP status can be re-established by re-taking the exam and obtaining eight hours of approved education in one year. Over the past three years alone (2012-2014), MCPs have accrued over 2,100 hours of continuing education. This enhanced knowledge has strengthened their ability to address complex planning-related problems.

Besides classroom-based continuing education classes, the Citizen Planner team initiated a MCP Webinar Series in 2014 consisting of six, one-hour webinars on advanced planning and zoning, community development, and other local government topics. The addition of the MCP Webinar Series allows MCPs in all corners of the state to maintain their credential without being burdened by long travel distances. For a list of upcoming training programs and webinars that offer MCP continuing education hours, visit [http://msue.anr.msu.edu/events/search?program=michigan\\_citizen\\_planner](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/events/search?program=michigan_citizen_planner).

## Capstone Projects

The capstone project requirement is intended to serve as an opportunity for a participant to share the knowledge gained with their community. Each MCP candidate is required to develop a presentation (20 minute minimum) on a topic learned in the Citizen Planner program that is applicable to the community. The presentation is given before the community’s legislative body or planning commission and must be delivered within 60 days of completion of the Citizen Planner classroom series or online course. Prior to 2012, Master Citizen Planners were required to complete a capstone project (later changed to the capstone presentation). Like the capstone presentation, the primary goal of the capstone project was for Citizen Planner participants to apply their learning to benefit their community.

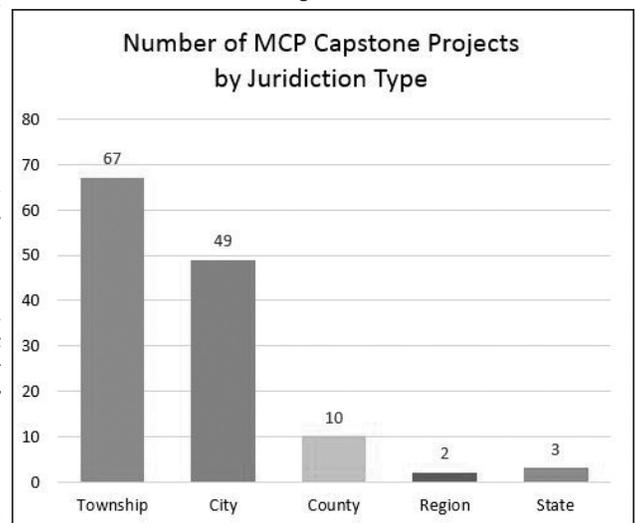
The MCP Capstone Projects and pre-

sentations demonstrate how citizen planners can overcome impediments in the planning process. The capstone projects empower MCPs to apply program objectives through a practical application in their communities. A majority of the Master Citizen Planner students completed Capstones that impacted their communities under one of four broad categories:

1. Environmental and natural resource planning
2. Master plan and zoning regulations
3. Community and economic development
4. Best practices and education.

Almost 50 percent of the capstones were carried out at the township level (Figure 1).

Figure 1



Data: 2006-2011

## Impacts

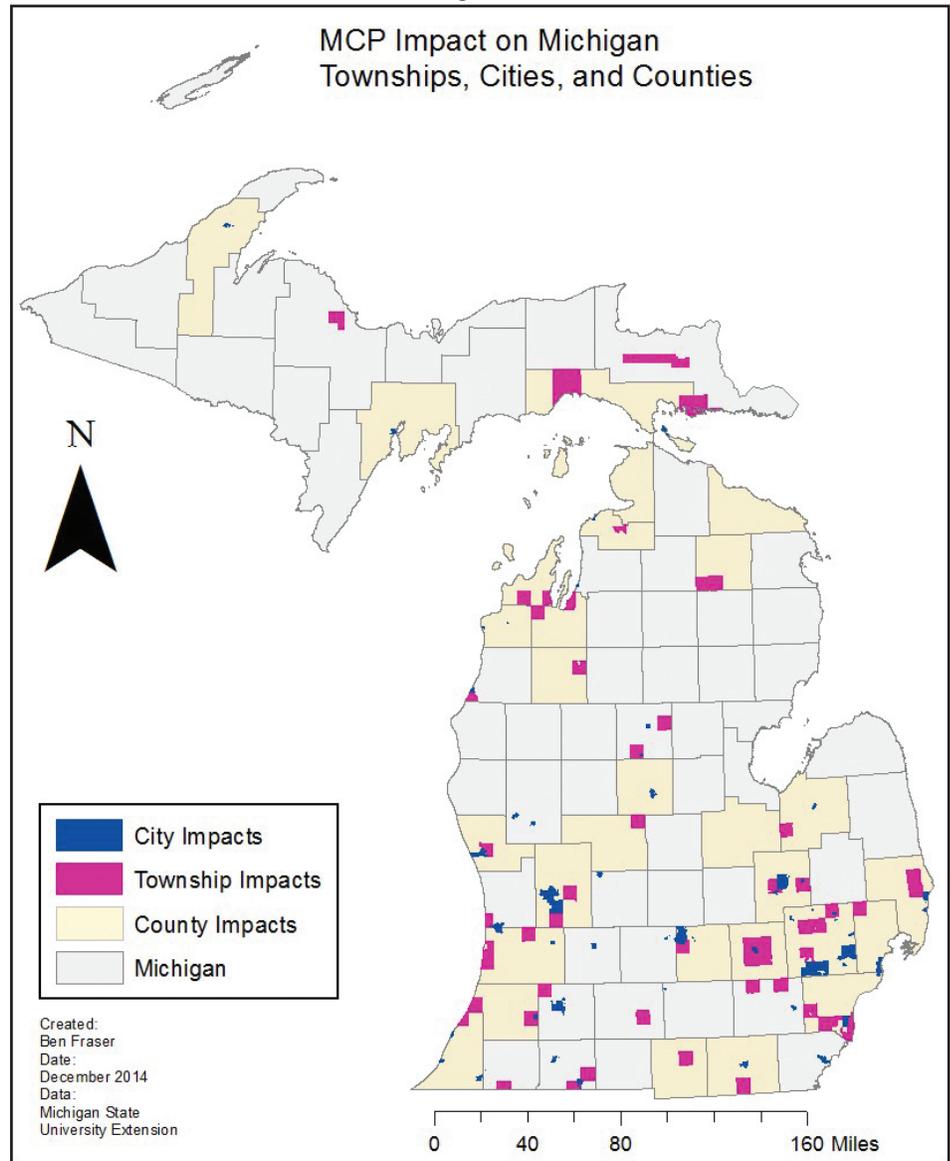
The cities, townships and counties that were impacted over the first six years of the MCP program (2006-2011), are illustrated in Figure 2. Some example impacts of capstones projects include:

- Expanded funding options for a Downtown Development Authority and support for a renewable energy renaissance zone, Charter Township of Kinross (Chippewa County). Using knowledge gained from the Citizen Planner training, a graduate created and presented a report outlining the advantages of creating a Downtown Development Authority for her community and funding options.
- A new community park focused on se-

nior citizen recreational opportunities, City of Howell (Livingston County). Recognizing the need for senior recreational activities, a Citizen Planner became the project manager on an initiative to build a senior citizen park. The project used grant dollars, volunteers and township staff while partnering with Wayne County in an innovative way. This one-of-a-kind park features a variety of activities and is well-attended.

- *Historic preservation planning and its economic, environmental, and social benefits, City of Three Rivers (St. Joseph County).* Referencing training received during the Citizen Planner program, a graduate created a professional presentation entitled "How Historic Preservation Can Help Your Community." She presented the information at a community event held at an historic theater in Three Rivers.
- *GIS zoning map enhancements, Muskegon Charter Township (Muskegon County).* Recognizing how essential an accurate, easy-to-read zoning map is, a program graduate realized that her community was still using an outdated, hard-to-read black and white copy. With help from the County Property Information Analyst, she created an updated, professional-looking map that is instrumental to both the township staff and to those looking to alter or develop property.
- *Installation of a low impact development rain garden, City of Grosse Pointe Farms (Wayne County).* A Citizen Planner used his talents as a civil engineer to design a rain garden at a local park. The 500-600 square foot garden is helping to keep Lake St. Clair clean by filtering the water before it is released back into the lake.
- *Wind energy planning, City of Manistee (Manistee County).* A program graduate applied his Citizen Planner knowledge to gather information about wind energy – different types of wind turbines and economic feasibility – and presented his findings to his local planning commission. The goal was to provide local leaders with a broad understanding of the wind energy industry and ways in which Manistee could get involved.
- *Multi-jurisdictional planning for a Planned Unit Development, Sturgis Township (St. Joseph County).* A Citizen Planner graduate helped develop zoning requirements for the I-9/M66 Planned Unit Development (PUD) project – a joint venture between Sturgis Township, the City of Sturgis (Michigan) and LaGrange County, Indiana. The goal of the PUD was to attract companies to build and invest, and to draw tourists to the area.

Figure 2



### Conclusion

Since the MCP Program launch in 2006, the program has consistently gained momentum bridging the gap between knowledge gained during training and applying that knowledge to address issues of local concern. The success of this one-of-a-kind model is apparent from its widespread impact, however there are still challenges to fully maximize its potential. There is a need for more MCP continuing education opportunities, increasing the number of Citizen Planner graduates that obtain MCP status, and the need to capitalize on the use of emerging technologies, to name a few. Despite these challenges, over 3,000 persons have participated in MCP continuing education training events (both graduates and non-graduates of the Citizen Planner course) since the program was launched. The launch of the Master Citizen Planner program at the national level in 2015 is evidence of its popularity and will provide enhanced opportunities for new partnerships and training resources. □

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# CITIZEN PLANNER HELPS MANISTEE PLANNERS ADDRESS CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

By Kurt H. Schindler, AICP, MSU Extension

It was a very controversial zoning decision. Even that is a big understatement. The public hearing had over 500 people attend with most signing cards indicating they wanted time to speak. The hearing lasted 17 hours, spread over three evenings. Instead of adjourning when the hour was late, the planning commission recessed and reconvened the next week to continue the hearing where they had left off. They did that twice before the hearing part of the meeting was over.

Before the hearing even started there was posturing as various sides pointed to possible conflicts of interest. This was not just someone in the audience making the charge. It was high priced attorneys who were brought in for the zoning hearing. It did not matter which way the planning commission ruled, the city was going to be sued.

The case was to build a coal-fired electric power plant on the Manistee Lake shore in Manistee City. Eventually the city turned the special use permit application down. The developer sued in federal court. The city prevailed.

*"A major reason for the city coming out on top was the training from Citizen Planner,"* Denise Blakeslee, Planning and Zoning Administrator, said. Citizen Planner taught us, and then we practiced what we needed to do; including the necessary detail in our minutes including records retention, and more.

As a result of Citizen Planner training, members of the city's planning commission, zoning board of appeals, and city staff all had a better understanding of the hearing and decision process, as well as what each person's role was, Blakeslee said. The city has people who know how to treat zoning permit applicants, have a command of the Open Meeting Act, how

to conduct meetings and how to conduct oneself.

*"It [Citizen Planner training] definitely made the process run smoother,"* Blakeslee said about the coal-fired electric generation plant case.

But the city's benefit from Citizen Planner is not just for this one case. Blakeslee explained the training benefits are seen across the board with the more run-of-the-mill operations as well. *"It gives our members of the zoning board of appeals and planning commission confidence in what they are doing."* Blakeslee said that benefit is what she likes most about the citizen planner training.

*"Planning Commission members are proud to be master Citizen Planners,"* Blakeslee said. *"The city is proud of that too."* City government invests in building that skill and in the continuing education required to retain the Master Citizen Planner title. It has become the unspoken expectation of expertise.

She also believes the training has resulted in members staying on the planning commission and zoning board of appeals for a longer time. With self-confidence citizen volunteers stay in their roles longer. *"It is not just the Christmas cookies I make for them each year,"* Blakeslee said.

The Citizen Planner class is the start. Equally important is the follow-up training. That follow-up training in the community is also appreciated. Local and state 'hot topics' such as classes on the New Economy, Placemaking, Open Meeting Act, Right to Farm Act, streamlining the zoning ordinance have all been well attended in Manistee.

*"Manistee City offers its council chambers meeting room to MSU Extension"* and Networks Northwest (formerly Northwest Michigan Council of Governments)

for the local training, Blakeslee said. It works to the city's advantage because the city's training costs are lower. The registration fee is lower because there is not a room charge. The big savings is the city does not have to pay its planning commission and zoning board of appeals members travel to drive elsewhere. In northern Michigan that can easily be over \$100 travel costs per automobile trip.

*"This has also brought city and surrounding township planning officials together,"* Blakeslee said. The audience in the training is often from all the municipalities in this area of the state. And those people are all in a room together, talking, networking, and getting to know each other. Everyone is exposed to that broader spectrum of issues and concerns. Blakeslee explained it also helps city volunteers and officials get to know various experts in the planning and zoning field. *"Many times the further training exposes us to resources and specialists we would not otherwise know about. And the city takes advantage of those services."*

*"That has created a community of planners in our area of the state,"* Blakeslee said. Cooperation and working together grows out of that community.

For herself, Blakeslee continued her own training even further. She has completed the Zoning Administrator Certificate Program offered by the Planning & Zoning Center at MSU. Those that have completed Citizen Planner (or are AICP and experienced at zoning administration) are eligible to take a 24 hour intensive training on zoning administration.

*"I use that training every day,"* Blakeslee said. The next round of those classes are in January 2015 at Frankenmuth. Visit <http://www.pzcenter.msu.edu/news.php> for more information. □

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## A CITIZEN PLANNER'S JOURNEY: From Village Planning Commission Member to Township Planner

By Kurt H. Schindler, AICP, MSU Extension

*"Continuing education and exposure to people in planning,"* Kathy Egan said is what Citizen Planner means to her. *"Knowing MSU Extension Educators, members of Extension's Government and Public Policy team, networking with people, information and opportunity"* all grew out of taking Citizen Planner and becoming a Master Citizen Planner.

Ms. Egan took the Citizen Planner training course in Leelanau County in 2001. At

that time she was in her second year on the village of Suttons Bay planning commission. Egan used those connections to provide benefits for her community and shape her career, she said.

She leveraged knowledge gained by connections. One week she met Extension Educator Kurt H. Schindler, and then the next week met now-retired Educator Rod Cortright. He was talking to Egan about this new type of zoning – Form-

Based Code – and told her that Schindler and he were looking for an applied research project in a small town to explore how it would work under Michigan's zoning statutes. It turns out the village was looking for a way to update its zoning and was intrigued with this new idea. Soon all persons were working together to make it happen.

Her participation in the Citizen Planner program brought that connection and

the parties together Egan said. That work ultimately lead to Ms. Egan being named Citizen Planner of the year. The networking continued when she learned of, and attended, MSU Extension's Great Lakes Leadership Academy in 2007. The networking continued providing contacts with people, professional planners in private practice, information sharing, and opportunity Egan said.

Egan is a University of Michigan graduate in environmental studies (which included one land use and planning class). "I liked the planning class a lot" she said. Serving on the village planning commission, then taking Citizen Planner, and keeping up continuing education as a Master Citizen Planner also opened up more doors.

*"It gave me the confidence to know*

*what I am doing,"* Egan said. "And to know I wanted to do more of it." So after a lot of self-education and practical experience, when Suttons Bay Township was looking for a planner she was able to combine her environmental studies education with training from Citizen Planner to apply for the job.

Egan has been the Suttons Bay Township planner since 2007. As planner she said she has continued to network through MSU Extension circles, Networks Northwest (formerly Northwest Michigan Council of Governments), and other organizations. She worked to bring the MSU Smart Growth Readiness Assessment Tool (and later the Waterfront Readiness Assessment Tool) to the township and village joint planning commission. That led

to a direction and focus for development of a joint Master Plan prepared by consulting planners.

This is a success story: from a new member of a village planning commission, participation in Citizen Planner training, participation in the creation of a form-based code, state-wide Citizen Planner of the Year award, building upon her university degree in a related field to become the planner in a township planning department. The distance was no farther than one side of the village to the other, but the journey provided a lifetime of rewarding knowledge and experience, and the chance to meet and interact with a lot of people that have enriched Egan's life and helped her to improve the quality of life for all the people that she has served. □

## JOBS AVAILABLE

The **City of Ypsilanti** has three related open positions:

### **Director of Economic Development.**

This is a department head position responsible for the overall management of the City's Economic Development, with a concentration in redevelopment, as well as managing operations of the Planning and Building divisions. Working with considerable independence and judgment under the general supervision of the City Manager, the Director of Economic Development supervises a small work force of employees integrating economic resources, community resources, building code enforcement, and land use into a viable working program to improve the economic climate of the community. Salary: \$65,000 – \$75,000 (DOQ).

**Requirements of Work:** The successful candidate will possess a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree but a Master's Degree is preferred from an accredited college or university with a major in public administration, planning, business or related field and five years of related experience or any combination of experience and training. Knowledge of the methods and principles of economic development; brownfield redevelopment funding methods and tax issues; Knowledge of Federal and State laws on community and economic development and related internal compliance data; Knowledge of financial analysis, negotiations, project management and proposal or grant writing; Ability to assemble multi-faceted programs and funds; Ability to influence, persuade and negotiate with various individuals and organizations; Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with supervisor, co-

workers, subordinates and the public; Ability to communicate effectively verbally and in writing. The applicant must be familiar with the ARC Geographic Information System (GIS).

**Planner I.** This is a professional planning position responsible for various economic and community development projects and initiatives for the City. This classification performs a variety of work and reports to the Director of Economic Development. An employee in this classification may supervise student interns. Salary: \$30,000 – \$45,000 (DOQ).

**Requirements of Work:** The successful candidate will possess a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree but a Master's Degree is preferred from an accredited college or university with a major in public administration, planning, business or related field and five years of related experience or any combination of experience and training. The applicant must be familiar with the ARC Geographic System (GIS). Knowledge of principles & procedures of professional planning; knowledge of private funding sources and restrictions; ability to communicate with a diverse population; proficient in computer word-processing and spreadsheet applications; ability to maintain effective working relationships with supervisor, subordinates, co-workers and the public.

**Planner II.** An employee in this classification is primarily responsible for the administration of the City's planning and zoning program. Under the supervision of the Director of Economic Development, the employee has considerable initiative and independence to meet the objectives

of the position. Facilitates the preparation and implementation of the Master Plan, Zoning Ordinance and other development-related regulations; Responsible for coordination of the City Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals; Monitors architects, engineers and private contractors for project specifications and work quality; Coordinates activities with appropriate City departments or private agencies and other stakeholders; Prepares memos and letters for City Council. The position may entail supervision of student interns. Salary: \$45,000 – \$55,000 (DOQ).

**Requirements of Work:** The successful candidate will possess a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree but a Master's Degree is preferred from an accredited college or university with a major in public administration, planning, business or related field and five years of related experience or any combination of experience and training. The applicant must be familiar with the ARC Geographic Information System (GIS). Knowledge of the principles and procedures of professional planning; Knowledge of private funding sources and restrictions; ability to communicate with a diverse population; proficient in computer word-processing and spreadsheet applications; ability to maintain effective working relationships with supervisor, subordinates, co-workers and the public.

**ANYONE INTERESTED** in applying for any of these positions must complete an online application at:

<http://cityofypsilanti.com/Government/Departments/HumanResources/JobPostingsDescriptions>

by 5:00 P.M. on Saturday, January 31, 2015. EOE □