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To Plan or Not to Plan Current Activity within Michigan's Local Governments



Welcome

Welcome to the latest edition of IPPSR Policy Brief. This edition was prepared using data generated by the Michigan Local Planning and Zoning Survey 2003, conducted by IPPSR's Office for Survey Research. The complete dataset may be viewed online at our website.

This is a publication of the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research that is meant to bring the latest research in executive summary format to policymakers and those interested in public policy issues. We value your input. Please let us know if you have any suggestions for future issues.

Why Planning and Zoning?

City planning has taken place for thousands of years, since the birth of cities themselves. As people began to come together to form urban centers, there was a need to organize into a meaningful pattern on the land. Where would people live? Where would commerce take place? Where would public works be developed? Where would roads be developed? As citizens answered these questions, cities took shape. One can look back to the grid-based system of ancient Roman cities to see that even by that time, logical systems had been developed to help urban areas efficiently

meet the needs of their populace in a visually appealing manner.

The same questions asked thousands of years ago continue to be the same basic questions asked of modern community planners. Central cities, suburbs, and rural areas alike have discovered a need to plan for how they will develop. A multitude of tools are now at the disposal of planners to assist them in helping shape communities at present and into the future. One very powerful, commonly-used tool is zoning.

Zoning is a way of controlling how land develops by dividing a community into certain areas and reserving each area for a specific purpose, such as residential development or industrial use. Within these districts, zoning can also be used to control the actual development on a piece of property. For instance, residential lot sizes may be limited to a minimum of one acre, or the height of a building may be capped at eighty feet. A U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1926 established the legality of zoning and allowed for its widespread use across the country.

How Does It Work in Michigan?

Planning and zoning in Michigan has most certainly been shaped by the structure of its

local units of government. Some 1,857 local units of government (272 cities, 261 villages, 1,241 townships, and 83 counties) occupy the landscape of the state. Counties in Michigan were first organized by the Northwest Territory Act of 1787; townships were laid out as the survey units of each county. As population in Michigan rapidly grew in the late 1800's, local units of government were called on to exercise more governmental responsibilities. In 1908, Michigan became a "home rule" state, thus mandating cities and villages to adopt charters to guide their governments. Similar powers were granted to charter townships in 1947. In the 1920's and 1930's, cities, villages, townships, and counties were first granted zoning, then planning, authority. Some of these laws were replaced in the 1940's when regional planning was first authorized.

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From 1934 to 1947, Michigan had a State Planning Commission in place. The Commission initiated comprehensive planning efforts that cut across all state departments and focused on achieving integrated and coordinated land-use planning. In addition to inventorying state resources and planning, the Commission was responsible for approving all county zoning ordinances, and also assisted in developing them. The Commission was terminated in 1947.

Without a statewide planning commission in place, local units of government were essentially free to plan and zone for their development as they saw fit, without necessarily taking into account surrounding communities. A somewhat confusing system emerged, as counties can plan for all units in a county, but only zone those townships without zoning in place. Local governments can choose to do their own planning and zoning, or, in some instances, not to do either. What has resulted is a hodgepodge of local units of governments with varying levels of planning.

Noting that there are indeed many units of government in Michigan exercising planning and zoning power, there have been seven systematic surveys of every local unit of government in Michigan to ascertain their planning and zoning capacities. Two were conducted by the State

Planning Commission. Four more were conducted by the State in 1969, 1972, 1976, and 1979. The last survey of this nature was conducted for the Michigan Society of Planning Officials by a consulting firm in 1994, and received about a 76% response rate.

IPPSR Survey

Noting that data on the planning and zoning capacities of local units of government had not been collected in nearly ten years, Michigan State University sought to update the previous 1994 survey. Statewide agencies had been routinely using ten year-old data to describe the state of local planning and zoning in Michigan. Thanks to grant funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, MSU's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR) was able to move forward with conducting this important survey. IPPSR partnered with several groups to make the survey a success: the Planning and Zoning Center, the Michigan Association of Counties, the Michigan Municipal League, the Michigan Society of Planning, the Michigan Townships Association, and MSU Extension.

The Michigan Local Planning and Zoning Survey 2003 was conducted by IPPSR's Office for Survey Research (OSR) between March 3 and September 30 of 2003. (The original survey document can be found online at www.ippsr.msu.edu/PPIE/LandUse/Resources.htm). Initial surveys were mailed to all counties, townships, cities, and villages in Michigan, with reminder postcards following shortly after. A second full mailing was sent to non-respondents. By June, OSR's phone laboratory began making follow-up phone calls to communities, first as a reminder, then to obtain missing information. By October, when the data collection phase was officially concluded, information had been collected from a staggering 93% of local governments in Michigan. By then, a process was initiated to

validate the information by performing logic checks and verifying suspect information.

Results of the Survey

During the survey process, two findings became immediately clear, though they were certainly not anticipated. One was that the sheer number of local governments in the state - 1,857 - was an overwhelming number with which to deal. Establishing contact and obtaining just basic information from this large a number of jurisdictions required an exceptional amount of time and funding. The second finding was that quite often communities were not aware of who was in charge of planning and zoning, or even whether or not the community had zoning in place. This led to some miscommunications. For instance, in a number of cases, several surveys were returned by different people for the same community, but with different information provided.

Master Planning

Approximately 27% of all local governments in Michigan do not have any sort of master planning document in place. Eighty percent of these communities also have a population of fewer than 2,000 persons. As the population of a community increases, so too does the likelihood that it will have a master plan in place. The one caveat to this generalization is that it does not apply to counties. Eight of Michigan's 20 largest counties (ranging from Macomb County to Muskegon County) do not have a master plan. This is so because in these more urban counties, local government units are more likely to have larger populations and thus more apt to plan for themselves.

Among community types, cities by far have the highest tendency to plan: only 5% of cities do not have a master plan in place (the most populous city in Michigan to report not having

Figure 1. Master or Comprehensive Plan by Community Type

		Type of Community				Total
		City	Village	Township	County	
Has your Community Adopted a Master or Comprehensive Plan?	Yes	254	155	756	61	1226
	No	12	67	364	22	465
Total		266	222	1120	83	1691

one is Owosso). Counties, townships, and villages all have master planning documents at about the same rate: between 71-74% (See Figure 1).

Regionally, Southeast Michigan communities have the most master planning documents in place (only 4% do not have any). Eighty-one percent of Southwest Michigan communities have master plans, while East-Central and West-Central Michigan communities have rates of 75% and 71%, respectively. Only 58% of communities in the Northern Lower Peninsula have master plans; that number drops to 45% in the Upper Peninsula.

In the 1994 survey, 69% of Michigan communities had adopted master plans. Today, three-quarters of Michigan's communities have a master plan on record. Also, 640 communities indicated in the survey that they have either updated their master plan since 2000 or are currently in the process of doing so.

Zoning Ordinances

Three out of four Michigan communities have their own zoning ordinances in place. An additional 13% are subject to county zoning (Bagley Township in Otsego County is the most populous township to report being subject to county zoning), bringing the total number of communities in Michigan with zoning ordinances up to 88% (Boston Township in Ionia County is the most populous township reporting that it has no zoning). A quarter of these communities are counties. Nineteen of Michigan's twenty largest counties do not zone at a county-wide level (Eaton County is the only one with county-wide zoning). Again,

Figure 2. Zoning Ordinance by Community Type

		Type of Community				Total
		City	Village	Township	County	
Has your Community Adopted a Zoning Ordinance?	Yes	265	186	797	25	1273
	No	1	38	325	58	422
Total		266	224	1122	83	1695

this is so because in these more urban counties, local government units are more likely to have larger populations and thus more apt to conduct zoning.

Almost all cities in Michigan (at least 97%) report having zoning ordinances. Eighty-three percent of villages and townships (both those with their own zoning and those subject to county zoning) report having zoning ordinances. Counties have the lowest rate of zoning ordinances in place; only 30% of counties have zoning ordinances (See Figure 2).

Once again, communities in Southeast Michigan are the most likely to have zoning ordinances on file: 95%. Southwest Michigan communities have zoning ordinances at a rate of 81%. East-Central and West-Central Michigan have respective rates of 79% and 72%. The Northern Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula have identical rates of 59%.

The number of communities in Michigan with zoning ordinances in 2003 is approximately the same as it was in 1994. Though the overall number has changed little, there has been

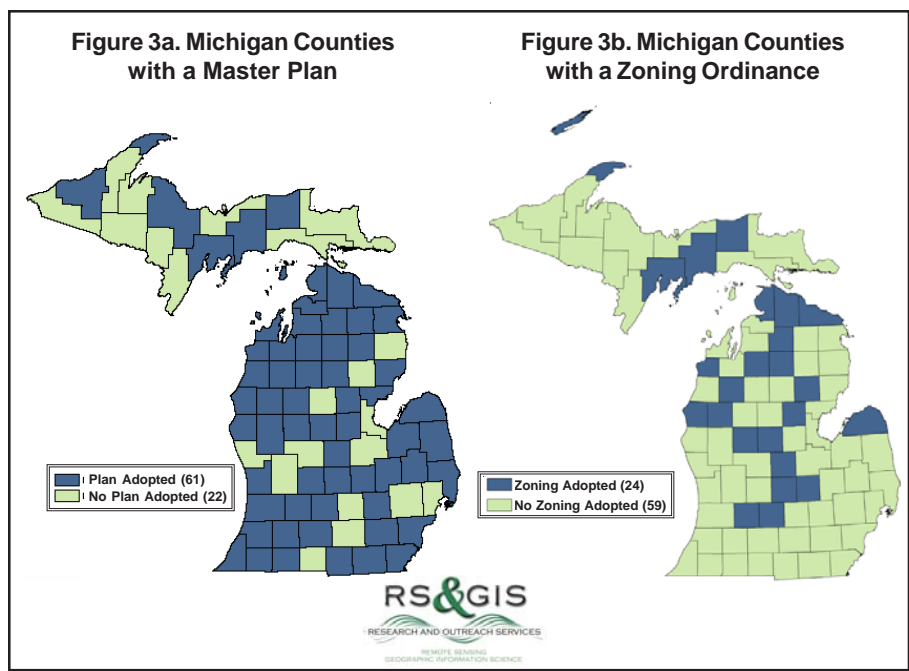
some activity in the addition and dissolution of zoning ordinances. For instance, in 2001 Lake County adopted county-wide zoning. As a result, several townships in Lake County went from having no zoning to county zoning. Two additional townships in Lake County adopted their own zoning ordinances at the same time. While Lake County was adjusting to its new ordinances, a year later (2002) Alger County repealed its zoning ordinances, citing that, "zoning seems to be more effective on the local level." Lake County remains in a state of transition, as several of its townships have or are working towards adoption of their own zoning ordinances.

Regional Cooperation

Sixty-five percent of respondents report that their community works closely with neighboring units of government to plan for land use, growth, and development. Some 83% of counties report that they work closely, while only 54% of villages indicate close cooperation. Collaboration between governmental units did not seem to depend on area of the state. A better predictor of cooperation was population. As this measure increases, so does the likelihood that a community will work with its neighbors. Only 47% of communities with population under 500 work closely with their neighbors, while 80% of communities over 100,000 do so.

GIS Usage

While a full two-thirds of communities in Michigan report that they update and maintain planning and zoning information using a computer database or other electronic retrieval system, only 30% of communities use a Geographical Information System (GIS) (Arcview is the most-used GIS system in use in Michigan, according to the survey). Counties are by far the leading users of GIS: two-thirds of counties have a system in operation. Forty-two percent of cities use GIS, but only 26% of townships and 14% of villages do. Certainly, the expense of owning and operating a GIS system is more cost-effective for larger units of government. Indeed, 95% of communities with over 100,000 residents have GIS in place,



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compared to 13% of communities with under 500 residents. There is some slight variation in GIS usage from region to region. Southeast Michigan has a rate of GIS usage of 42% in its local governments, whereas the Upper Peninsula and East-Central regions only have a usage rate of 18-19%. Other regions exhibit an approximate rate of 30%.

Conclusion

Though it can be said that not much has changed in terms of the

number of communities practicing planning and zoning in the state, it is still significant to point out that even today, 27% of Michigan's communities still have no master planning document in place. On top of that, at least 12% (220) of Michigan's communities have no zoning. While it is mostly smaller communities that do not plan or zone, a number of these places are located in areas that are or could soon be high-growth areas. This is especially significant given that development in Michigan is outpacing its population growth rate eight times over. As a result, areas with a rural character now could soon find themselves under

immense development pressure. Even if the pressure to develop is not so great, a community can only benefit from putting some thought into where and how future development will occur.

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regions) to be more greatly involved in planning and zoning decisions. Planning at the county or regional level would not only allow for a pooling of capacity at one centralized office, but it would also allow for a more efficient land-use plan for a larger land area.

While two-thirds of local government units across the state report that they are working closely with other neighboring units to more effectively address planning and land-use issues, a full one-third (around 600) are not. Perhaps in the future these units will work more

closely together, in order to more efficiently use resources (human, technological, and otherwise) and jointly plan.

For More Information

For a detailed look at the institutional structure for making land-use decisions in Michigan, please see the Institutional Structure for Land Use Decision Making in Michigan: Working Paper prepared for the Michigan Society of Planning Officials by Mark Wyckoff, FAICP, of the Planning & Zoning Center. For further information, please contact David Downey at the Michigan Society of Planning at dtdowney@planningmi.org or (734) 913-2000.

For more information on this issue of IPPSR Policy Brief please contact Brian McGrain, IPPSR Special Projects Manager, at mcgrainb@msu.edu or IPPSR's Director of Policy Analysis, Amy Baumer, at baumeram@msu.edu. The complete dataset may be found at www.ippsr.msu.edu/PPIE/LandUse/Resources.htm. Additional information on planning and zoning in the state of Michigan can be obtained by contacting the Planning and Zoning Center, Inc. at freebury@pzcenter.com or (517) 886-0555.