



**Michigan Association of Planning
A Chapter of the American Planning Association**

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Decision Making

Making Effective Decisions

Following a logical decision making process is one of the most effective ways to avoid challenges to decisions. Careful consideration and support of decisions through the use of standards in the zoning ordinance is important. If a decision is challenged, the importance of using the ordinance's standards becomes clear. A well-supported decision provides the background needed to build a solid legal foundation for the decision.

Findings of Fact

Deliberation typically involves fact-finding and discussion before a motion is made.

- Facts are nothing more than the information that is pertinent to making a decision. Important sources of facts include the application, ordinance requirements, physical characteristics of the site and adjacent parcels, staff and agency reports, and neighbor comments.
- The purpose of discussion is to review pertinent facts from all information presented and to seek a majority viewpoint. The discussion should proceed long enough for someone to feel confident in proposing a complete motion that embodies most of the important findings.

Motions

The motion to approve, deny or approve with conditions should state the conclusion, and the rationale for the conclusion, indicating how the facts support the decision reached. A motion must have a maker and second; a description of the nature of the request; the action taken (approval, approval with conditions, denial, tabling); any

conditions attached to affirmative decisions; and the reasons for the action taken (applicability of standards).

In some communities, either staff or legal counsel prepares a motion or several motions in advance with space for additions/deletions. This is not an effective practice as it implies that decisions were determined prior to the public hearing.

Some Hints for Making Motions

- Motions may have to withstand scrutiny by a court and should be carefully phrased.
- Be sure everyone is clear on the motion.
- Reference relevant sections of the ordinance and staff reports.
- Whenever possible, make motions in the positive. This helps eliminate confusion associated with negative motions, when a motion to deny means that a “yes” is actually a “no.” The public and applicant (or the members) may not be sure of the result of the vote.