

# MICHIGAN PLANNER 'E-dition'



A Publication of the Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association

## Welcome to the first Michigan Planner E-dition!

Dear Amy,

The Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association is excited to deliver the first edition of the Michigan Planner E-dition (electronic edition), a supplement to the bi-monthly print edition of the Michigan Planner magazine.

The E-dition format brings you valuable information on planning basics as well as current planning trends and a wide variety of featured topics. These articles are meant to be brief; however they will often contain links to additional articles, resources and web sites, allowing you to explore topics in as much or little detail as you wish.

Each E-dition will include basic planning and zoning articles about procedures, policies, and applications (particularly useful to newly elected and appointed officials), combined with more advanced topics (for the veteran planner). The ZBA ZONE and Officially Yours columns will appear regularly to continue the monthly stream of information to our community officials, while CONNECT will keep you current on topics buzzing around our office and the nation.

We encourage you to share this information with other community staff and officials. Simply forward the email or print the articles, and pass these valuable resources along.

We hope you enjoy the first Michigan Planner E-dition.

### Featured Article Social Media and Local Governments

#### Why Should Local Governments Care About Social Media?

By: Nina Misuraca Ignaczak, Senior Planner  
[Oakland County Planning & Economic Development Services](#)

Chances are, your kids, parents, friends, and colleagues are on Twitter, and your local grocery store has a Facebook fan page. No longer the exclusive province of Gen X and Y, social media is transforming the communications landscape. With 750 million Facebook and 175 million Twitter users, new media is exploding at the same time traditional media is undergoing steep decline. [Read more...](#)

### Officially Yours Planning Commission Updates/Reconstitution

By: Kurt Schindler, AICP  
[Michigan State University Extension](#)

Now passed and gone is the deadline for Planning Commission's in Michigan to have updated the ordinance which created their community's planning commission-or replaced a resolution creating a planning commission with a new ordinance. The deadline was July 1, 2011. [Read more...](#)

Do you want more information on a particular planning basic or hot trend? Let us know. We are always happy to take requests for article topics and value the opportunity to give members resources they need. E-mail [lcarlson@planningmi.org](mailto:lcarlson@planningmi.org) with ideas and submissions.

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### ZBA ZONE Form Based Codes

Form-based codes are an alternative to conventional zoning.

Form-based codes address the relationship between:

1. building facades and the public realm;
2. the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another and;
3. the scale and types of streets and blocks.

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## Social Media and Local Government

By: Nina Misuraca Ignaczak, Senior Planner  
[Oakland County Planning & Economic Development Services](#)

### Why Should Local Governments Care About Social Media?

Chances are, your kids, parents, friends, and colleagues are on [Twitter](#), and your local grocery store has a [Facebook](#) fan page. No longer the exclusive province of Gen X and Y, social media is transforming the communications landscape. With 750 million [Facebook](#) and 175 million [Twitter](#) users, new media is exploding at the same time traditional media is undergoing steep decline. The 2009 closure of the [Ann Arbor News](#) and five metro Detroit [Eccentric-Observer](#) papers reflects a national trend: local daily and community weekly newspapers are in peril. This development has special significance for local government: as traditional outlets for publicizing community events, services and public meetings dwindle, local governments must find alternative ways to engage the public.

Just as the decline of traditional media affects the ability of local government to reach citizens, it impairs the ability of citizens to participate in government. With the demise of community newspapers citizens are less likely to hear about community events, know what is going on at City Hall or when important meetings are, and can no longer express their views by writing letters to the editor. The lines of communication critical to the function of democracy are being irrevocably altered.

Social media represents one solution to this dilemma.

### What is Social Media and How Does it Work?

Social media is media designed to be distributed by social networks. Wikipedia [lists](#) 180 distinct, active social media sites on the internet. Fortunately, the most important ones are limited to the following:

#### Social Networking Sites

**Facebook:** Organizations [create a Facebook page](#) which users can voluntarily “like”, which means content pushed out through that network will enter into the user’s newsfeed. The organization can and posts update, web links, photos, and videos to which followers can comment and share within their own networks.

**Twitter:** Organizations create a Twitter feed which users can “follow”. Each post or “tweet” contains text and links, and cannot exceed 140 characters. Posts are “re-tweeted” throughout the “twitterverse”.

#### Photo and Video Sharing Sites

**YouTube:** Organizations create a video channel to which other users subscribe. Videos are limited to ten minutes per video upload.

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**Flickr:** Organizations create an account for this photo sharing site, and connect as friends to other accounts.

## **Blogging**

Blogging is a form of online journaling to which readers can subscribe and post comments. Entries have no size limit and can contain videos, photos, and links. Free and low-cost third-party blogging tools include [Blogger](#), [WordPress](#), and [TypePad](#).

## **Social News:**

The latest social incarnation to arrive on the scene is actually a hybrid between social media and traditional news sites. Nearly every major newspaper's website now has a social component allowing users to log-in via Facebook or Twitter and to share and comment on news items. Start-ups such as [Patch](#) cover hyperlocal news and are built with both social media and community news in mind. Readers can create profiles, comment and share via social networks, and even blog on the site. The news sites host community calendars and "push out" events and contents to users via social media or email newsletters.

## **Getting Started**

The [Fels Institute of Government](#) at the University of Pennsylvania prepared a [guidance document](#) for local governments interested in social media. According to the report, common concerns center on legality, workload and public criticism. The report provides tools to address these concerns and cites examples of governments who found them unwarranted or manageable. The document advises developing an organizational social media policy defining roles, responsibilities, and procedures to maintain quality control. Existing policies can be found by searching "social media" at [munigov.org](#).

Developing a social media plan is an important first step. Plans can be centralized or department-specific and should, at a minimum, identify the social media channels to be used, craft goals, assign and schedule tasks, and include a mechanism for evaluation. A fundamental barometer of success, according to the Fels report, is audience size: the number of followers. A second barometer is activity; shares, comments, likes, retweets, etc.

## **Examples in Local Government**

Cities such as [Alpena](#) and [Traverse City](#) maintain city-level Facebook fan pages. Downtown Development Authorities and Chambers of Commerce make active use of social media; the Rochester DDA maintains [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Flickr](#) presences, and uses these channels to promote DDA events and local businesses, which often in turn have their own Facebook pages.

Larger governments may find it useful to maintain multiple departmental social media identities. Oakland County government maintains separate Facebook pages for

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[Parks & Recreation](#), [County Executive](#), [Main Street Oakland County](#), [Arts, Culture & Film](#), [Water Resources Commissioner](#), and [Pet Adoption Center](#). Each department also makes use of Twitter and blogging to varying degrees, and several project specific sites have been created.

## **Strengthening Democracy**

As a nation whose founding principles are based on freedom of the press, America has always valued the role of media in making democracy function. Thomas Jefferson said *"If it were left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."*

We are now drawing closer to a time when local newspapers are becoming obsolete. In order to ensure the continued function of our democracy, we must find substitutions.

The ["Open Government Directive"](#) initiative of the Obama administration calls for making government more transparent, collaborative, and participatory through harnessing technology. Governor Snyder's call for increased government transparency echoes this sentiment. Through the judicious use of social media tools, local governments can achieve these goals.

## **Embracing the New**

New technology is intimidating, and local governments strapped for resources may be reluctant to take on new endeavors. However, social media is here to stay, and will increasingly become the mainstay of media and communications. Over time, use of social media can become integrated with normal business operations.

Careful thought and planning on the part of local government on the use of social media has the potential to inform the public, enhance interaction with constituents and ultimately strengthen democracy.

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## **Resources:**

[Michigan Municipal League Social Media Webinar- September 27, 2011](#)

[Making the Most of Social Media: 7 Lessons from Successful Cities](#)

[ICMA Social Media Guidance Site](#)

[Online Database of Local Government Social Media Policies](#)

## MICHIGAN PLANNING COMMISSION UPDATES/RECONSTITUTION

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By: Kurt Schindler, AICP

[Michigan State University Extension](#)

Now passed and gone is the deadline for Planning Commissions in Michigan to have updated the ordinance which created their community's planning commission—or replaced a resolution creating a planning commission with a new ordinance. The deadline was July 1, 2011. The original planning commission ordinance, resolution, or founding document, is the document that was adopted to create your community's planning commission.

By this time every municipality and county with a planning commission should have located their founding documents, reviewed them to determine what updates are needed, and adopted those updates. A vast majority of townships, and counties, and a significant number of cities will need to update or replace those founding documents. This is a result of the codified of planning acts into the [Michigan Planning Enabling Act \(MPEA\) Act 33 of 2008 \(MCL 125.3801 et seq.\)](#).

There are important changes that need to be made to validate future decisions made by your planning commission. Because these changes address the creation and establishment of the planning commission, some procrastinating municipalities are following their attorney's recommendation not to allow their planning commission to meet at all after July 1, 2011, until the updating process is complete and in effect.

The following is a list of some of the changes that should have been made to your local ordinance:

- If your planning commission was originally created by resolution (nearly all townships), a new ordinance which creates a planning commission, is now required and must be adopted.
- If the membership of your planning commission is determined predominantly by geographic representation, at least that part of the ordinance will need to be updated. The MPEA requires that planning commission membership shall be representative of important segments of the community. The statute then goes on to list examples of those major interests: "government, agriculture, natural resources, recreation, education, public health, government,

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transportation, industry, and commerce." The actual list of major interests can be different and unique for each local government--but needs to be specifically spelled out in the planning commission ordinance --with one set of interest(s) to one seat relationship. Note that none of the examples introduce the concept of having individual members from different geographic parts of the local government.

The last sentence of the subsection, [MCL 125.3815\(3\)](#), says "The membership shall also be representative of the entire territory of the local unit of government to *the extent practicable*." Membership is for the entire territory, not districts or parts. The qualifier "to the extent practicable" suggests geographic representation, if geography is used at all, takes second place to the primary purpose of membership representing the community's major interests. The order of importance is noted because the representation of major interests is the mandatory "*shall*" without any qualifiers. (The only exception to this membership change is for a city, where the city charter spells out membership requirements, appointment process, and organization.)

- There are also changes to ex officio members of planning commissions (some communities used to call these "liaison" members) that may require changing an older planning commission ordinance.
- If your planning commission is still not called a "planning commission" that is a change to the ordinance that may still need to be done.
- There may be further changes needed in your community, not outlined here. Please reference [PA 33 of 2008](#) for all ordinance requirements.

Failing to update, or adopt a new planning commission ordinance might jeopardize decisions made after July 1, 2011 by the planning commission. As many counties and municipalities were rushing during the month of June to get this task done, there was a common theme from a number of municipal attorneys. They were overwhelmingly advising their clients to not hold any planning commission meetings after June 30, 2011, and not before the effective date of the updated founding documents. The reasoning was not wanting to risk exposure of the municipality to a challenge over the validity of the planning commission decision; not wanting to expend local resources on such a challenge; and a lack of confidence that they could defend against such a challenge coupled with the philosophy of why take the chance if it can be avoided. It

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is important for all communities to heed these warnings and examine their own ordinance to see that these updates are made.

Once the planning commission is reorganized, a careful review of the planning commission's bylaws should also be done. [Bylaws](#) are required by MPEA. At a minimum, bylaws should include sections on conflict of interest, election of officers, meeting minutes, transaction of business, and process of calling a special meeting. Best practice would be bylaws that cover much more than just this minimum list.

**For sample ordinances and more information please visit:**

[Copy of a sample planning commission ordinance](#)

[Copy of a sample planning commission bylaws](#)

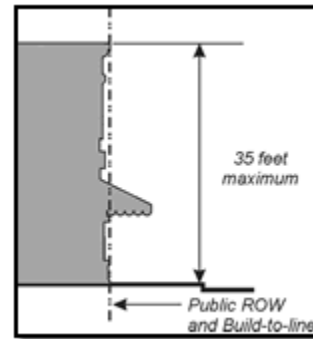
[Copy of a sample planning commission \(and ZBA\) code of conduct](#)

[For more materials, as well as MS Word and WordPerfect versions of the above samples](#)

## WHAT ARE *FORM-BASED CODES*?

*Form-based codes* are an alternative to conventional zoning. Conventional zoning separates uses into districts (residential, industrial, commercial, etc.) whereas form-based code addresses the relationship between:

- 1.) building facades and the public realm;
- 2.) the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another and;
- 3.) scale and types of streets and blocks.



[Local Government Commission, 2010.](#)

Communities designed with form-base codes provide:

- Flexible space that can service many uses
- Places that attract people of all ages
- Places that combine employment, retail, civic and residential uses
- A pedestrian-oriented environment in which there are sidewalks, and in higher density areas, basic retail and services shops are within a 1/4 mile
- A link between building and public spaces
- Streets that are built for all users (e.g. pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles)
- Small blocks

Form-based codes are very strict about fundamental issues such as the creation of public space; less-important rules such as on-site parking and micromanagement of land use types are loosened compared to typical zoning codes.

**Why is this planning technique important?** Talented, well-educated people who are the key to success in the New Economy are attracted to the quality living environments that form-based codes create. They like amenities and places that attract people. Proponents of form-based code say that these development regulations offer great predictability in what the end product (development) will look like. Examples of desired development are illustrated through the ordinance in the form of site layout, frontage types, streetscapes, building types and pictures. Some communities re-write their zoning ordinance to implement form-based codes, while most communities apply a form-based code to a limited portion of their community; often to downtown or key redevelopment areas that have been the subject of detailed physical planning.

*This article is an excerpt, originally published in Livingston County Department of Planning- County Planning Connection, WINTER 2011. For the article in its entirety visit: [www.co.livingston.mi.us](http://www.co.livingston.mi.us)*

For sample codes visit the [Form-Based Codes Institute](#)  
Zoning Practice and the [American Planning Association](#)  
Information on [Smart Growth and Michigan communities:](#)  
National examples of codes that support [Smart Growth Development:](#)