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Planning is Distinctly Human

Planning is a distinctively human capability—only people can think abstractly about a goal or objective and then design an orderly plan or procedure to accomplish it.

People regularly have all sorts of goals and plans to achieve them. In fact, we think goals and plans are essential for orderly living. Consider for example, the goal of getting to work at 8 o'clock in the morning. You have several bits of information around which you form a plan. You know that showering, dressing, brewing the coffee, eating breakfast, and driving to work take a certain amount of time and so make your plans accordingly.

We all adopt goals and develop plans as individuals. But we also plan as groups—organizations, corporations, and as communities. As a community planning commissioner, you are now part of a small group—perhaps from very different backgrounds and work or educational experiences—that has the task of leading the planning process that occurs in your family.

On being and effective planning commissioner

Planning commissions have two major obligations. Under Michigan law, the commission's primary responsibility is to develop and adopt a comprehensive master plan. The second, and perhaps more time consuming responsibility is to provide leadership to the local legislative body and local administrators in using or implementing the master plan and related plans.

The work of the planning commission, then, follows a logical process—studying various problems and aspects of the community, developing a community master plan and related plans, recommending rules to regulate development activities, and then evaluating these proposals against the comprehensive master plan. If your planning commission builds good relations with the legislative body and community

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and recommends carefully considered development policies and rules, you will find your efforts being rewarded as you see your community mature into a place that functions efficiently and is pleasingly aesthetically.

Creating a mosaic

But this does not happen all at once. The planning commission, especially after the comprehensive plan and development policies and rules are in place, formulates its guidance through decision on individual cases. These usually come in response to proposals advanced by developers, public officials, and private citizens.