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The following text is excerpted from the *Basic Training* supplemental materials accompanying the 2007 Regional Workshop series "Basic Training." Basic Training will be offered at several locations throughout the state in February 2007. For more information on attending a workshop near you, see pages 2 and 3.

**Relationship between the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance**

The comprehensive plan provides the planning commission with the opportunity to look beyond the day-to-day zoning issues and provide guidance for the future use of land and development in the community. A properly developed, well thought-out comprehensive plan can be of great value to a community in its efforts to improve quality of life, make more efficient use of financial and other resources, provide a cleaner environment, and build an economically healthy community.

However, the value of any comprehensive plan is directly related to the community's willingness to follow the plan, and its diligence in keeping the plan current and relevant to today's conditions. Once adopted the plan must be implemented through appropriate zoning regulations, and changes to the zoning districts or map. This must be followed by consistent use of the plan. Failure to do so consistently will discredit any attempt to use the plan as a defense for actions challenged by property owners or developers.

Likewise, prompt implementation and consistent and vigorous use of the plan will lend credibility to the community's decisions on rezonings or other zoning actions. While the courts of the State of Michigan do not recognize the absolute authority of the comprehensive plan, they do lend much more credibility to actions supported by careful planning than those which appear to be taken arbitrarily against an individual property owner.

The relationship between the comprehensive plan and the zoning ordinance is often misunderstood, but there are clear legal and administrative differences. For example, while the comprehensive plan is a guide for the future use of land, the zoning

ordinance regulates the use of land in the present. As a guide, the plan is not a binding, legal document, but is useful to support the legal strength of the zoning ordinance.

A key difference between a comprehensive plan and the zoning ordinance is timing. The comprehensive plan is intended to show the future use of land at some point during the planning period, which could project as far ahead as 20 years or more. The zoning ordinance, on the other hand, is immediate, regulating land use today.

Since the comprehensive plan determines the future use of land, rezonings, a change in the zoning ordinance that changes a described parcel of land from one zoning district to another should generally be consistent with the plan. This is not to say that all rezonings that are consistent with the plan should automatically be approved. Nor does it mean that a request that is not consistent with the plan should automatically be denied.

Rather, it is necessary for the planning commission to examine the conditions that were present when the plan was adopted and determine if those conditions are still present or true. If the conditions originally present when the plan was adopted have changed significantly, the plan may warrant reconsideration. If no changes have occurred, the plan should be given strong deference.

For those instances where the request is inconsistent with the plan, it is appropriate to require an amendment to the plan prior to acting on the rezoning request. This affords the planning commission the opportunity to consider the long range implications of their actions, rather than being driven by a specific rezoning request.

Highlighted box, on page 1,  
**Updating the Zoning Ordinance**

**QUIZ:** *When is the best time to update your Zoning ordinance?*

- A. Whenever we get sued and lose...**
- B. When our attorney or planner tells us**
- C. Whenever something comes up we hadn't thought of**
- D. After the comprehensive plan is completed**
- E. Minimum once a year**
- F. All of the above**

**See page 4 for the answer.**

Highlighted box, on page 4  
**Updating the Zoning Ordinance**

**Which answer did you choose?** There is some truth in all of these responses; any number of events may create the need to update the zoning ordinance. However, one of the appropriate times for a thorough review and update is after the comprehensive plan has been completed, or updated.