



Michigan Association of Planning
A Chapter of the American Planning Association

Planning and Zoning Officials Academy Vol. 12, No. 3

The Planning and Zoning Officials Academy provides local elected and appointed officials with both basic and advanced topics addressing issues that are unique to the role as a local government representative.

Using the Master Plan

Master plans serve as instruments which guide the evolution of the community by bringing the social, physical, and economic and political considerations into more meaningful focus. Master plans have many other practical advantages as decision making guides, including:

1. **Public understanding and participation:**
The straight-forward character of the master plan aids public understanding of the planning process and how goals for community are to be achieved.
2. **Consistency:** Clearly stated policies covering all concerns of the master plan can do much to minimize the possibility of arbitrary decision making.
3. **Efficiency:** When a growing community is confronted with problems of a recurring nature, use of the master plan may reduce the amount of time spent on an individual project without lowering the quality of planning recommendations.
4. **Coordination:** The master plan creates a single framework within which all elements of government may act in concert on development proposals.
5. **Continuity:** A master plan is general by nature and thus provides an element of continuity as specific proposals of the plan are implemented or modified over time.

6. **Guide to decision-making and review:** The plan is helpful as a guide in adopting land-use controls, and to the courts in judging the fairness of specific controls in the context of community goals.

As the master plan provides the basis for the zoning ordinance, zoning decision should be consistent with the plan. The master plan is one item the planning commission takes into account with rezoning requests, special land-uses, and site plan review. If the master plan is rigorously followed, it will often support controversial decisions made in favor of the plan.

The master plan can serve as a powerful tool again guiding utility extensions and capital improvements. The future land-use plan describes the projected development of the community and can identify where capital improvements may be necessary to support growing populations and expanding business.

The data and the analysis of the interrelations of land-uses include in the master plan provide a sound basis for evaluating the impacts of proposed development. The master plan also serves as a policy statement on the desired community environment and what types of development are considered compatible with the desired future community character.

The master plan can also identify the need for recreational facilities, based upon the areas designated for future residential development, and the amount of population needing to be served. Furthermore, the master plan can be used for setting priorities for recreation facility planning.

Decisions on necessary transportation improvements should be based in part on the future land-use plan. Land-use and transportation demands are closely interrelated. Improvements to transportation facilities such as roads can be made in coordination with the gradual implementation or development of the future land-use plan.

Is your master plan up-to-date? There is not better time than today to bring it current. Making your master plan current can be as simple as an amendment to a section or physical area or as thorough as a complete update.