

MICHIGAN PLANNER



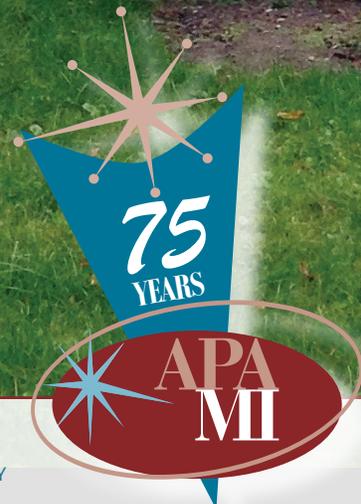
Michigan Chapter
American Planning Association

EQUITY

In Economic Development
and Beyond

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As I write the Connect feature for this issue of the Michigan Planner, it is on the heels of Governor Whitmer declaring a stay at home Executive Order, a week after declaring a state of emergency in response to Michigan's first confirmed coronavirus cases. When you read this, our greatest hope is that the spread of the pandemic will have been contained, with things returning to normal. One can only hope.

This pandemic reinforces the role of government at all levels to protect the health, safety and welfare of its citizens. And community planners, are of course, central to much of this work.

Our national organization, the American Planning Association, and its Legislative and Policy Committee, (LPC) had been working on an update of the current Hazard Mitigation Policy Guide (originally adopted in 2014) for many months before the COVID19 outbreak. This update was scheduled for adoption at the Delegate Assembly during next month's National Planning Conference in Houston, a conference that has since been cancelled. The language in the draft update applicable to Disease and Pandemics is:

9. Disease/Pandemic

The American Planning Association and its Chapters and Divisions support the following Policy Outcomes:

- 9.1 Support the development of interdisciplinary teams of public health experts, physicians, scientists, media, and communications professionals to help build local capacity to recognize and manage critical public health and safety issues, including disease/pandemic outbreaks, immediately following detection and before state and federal resources can be mobilized.
- 9.2 Develop national and state communications plan for consistent and timely public health information on the appropriate responses to disease outbreaks and pandemic events.
- 9.3 Strengthen the ability of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to conduct surveillance of human and animal influenza viruses and risk assessments of influenza viruses with pandemic potential.
- 9.4 Enhance federal, state, and local investments in infrastructure and regulation to protect water and food sources from contamination and effectively remove disease-carrying vectors to the extent practical.
- 9.5 Ensure that federal, state, and local plans are in place for managing pandemics and the associated increase in fatalities.
- 9.6 Support and help fund the protection of waterways and other conduits of disease or contamination from causing future exposure to assist with community compliance with America's Water Infrastructure Act (AWIA) and other laws and programs.

While the comment period is closed, the policy draft can be found here:

<https://www.planning.org/media/document/9195893/>

MAP staff are working from home, and have introduced many new distance communication platforms, including Slack and Google Docs. Prior to this emergency, MAP had already implemented remote access and remote work opportunities. All MAP staff are able to access email and remote into desktops from a web-based service. Most of our laptops even allow for remote printing. We are prepared to continue to serve our members and partners throughout this pandemic.

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Egg Balancing without the Egg
by Clint Budd

Equity

When the idea for this issue of the *Michigan Planner* originated in early 2019 at the board retreat - through the board members identification of equitable economic development as MAP's policy priority for the year - COVID-19 had not yet emerged as a global pandemic. The emergence of this pandemic reveals how ill-equipped we are as a society to respond to public health crises like this, and specifically how we respond to the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities. From decreased wages and access to food and public transportation, to the corresponding potential loss of housing resulting from subsequent inability to pay rent or mortgages, development policies for too long have unequally provided benefit to all members of our communities.

This month's Michigan Planner was intended to spur planners to the actions that will make our master plans more equitable and inclusive, and provide solutions for more equitable economic development outcomes. Our current situation at the national, state and local level demonstrates that we must do much more.

ELLA MAE'S PLACE

313-383-9593

2251



DECC's Motor City Match Program helps open small businesses in the City of Detroit, with the majority of winners being minorities and women entrepreneurs.

Working For Equity in Economic Development

Economic development can be a means to many desirable, interconnected ends: investment leads to more jobs, closer access to goods and services for residents, vibrant communities with higher property values, and increased municipal revenues, among other things. It is also a force that is powerful in its ability to either help or hinder economic and racial equity in communities, especially in Michigan's urban legacy cities that have experienced decades of disinvestment.

Studies show that nationally, wealth continues to concentrate in the hands of fewer and fewer people. According to

Forbes, in 1989, the richest 10% held 60% of the total household wealth; by 2018, the richest 10% held 70% of total household wealth. The share of wealth funneled to the top 1% jumped from 23% in 1989 to 32% in 2018. This growing wealth gap is the premier driver of economic inequality and undoubtedly challenges the quality of life for the residents and stakeholders who planners serve. Black families, with just a tenth of the wealth, on average, of white families, disproportionately shoulder the burden of this trend.

While not a silver bullet, inclusive economic development can reduce wealth

disparity through job creation, property ownership, increased property values, and revenue from developments. However, to realize these positive externalities, development professionals must employ market interventions that promote equitable economic development. Change is possible if economic development professionals prioritize the following: understanding the character and culture of each community, increasing access to opportunity, and preserving development that is vulnerable to market forces.

Develop to the Community's Vision

It probably goes without saying that not all development is 'good' development, but in order to make that distinction, planners must have a keen understanding of their community. What do people value? How do they define themselves? These are important questions to ask, not once, but often through authentic engagement, to begin and maintain an ongoing dialogue with the people planners serve.

Change is often met with some skepticism, if not concern or resistance. Many activities that spur economic development, such as ground-up commercial construction, streetscaping or the addition of a big box retailer, can alter the character of a community – something that is inevitably linked to the identity of its residents. It's important to consider the differences in how stakeholders might react to plans for a new Target store versus a new Dollar General, as an example.

Aligning a shared community vision for increased investment with stakeholder goals is key to equitable development, as it meets the current population where they are instead of pushing projects and concepts that are culturally misaligned. Consider not only the products and services new development may offer the community, but the price point, the 'feel', the ownership – does it reflect the community? If the proprietors and patrons of a new business do not look like the majority of the community's stakeholders, it is worth considering who this business is really for.

For another useful perspective, don't forget to use professional data and research in conversations with the community. The Detroit Economic Growth Corporation often hears residents requesting certain types of retailers that the residents' current spending patterns will not sustain, for instance, cafes and bakeries. Given the amount of money it takes to start a business, attracting a type of business that the market can't support does a great disservice to the entrepreneur



Community members attend workshop on accessing commercial property development opportunities in Detroit.

and can put them in a place of personal economic distress. Understanding market data gives greater dimension to an attraction strategy, bolstering its sustainability.

Access for All

Indeed, real estate investment and entrepreneurship – the cornerstones of economic development – are risky endeavors that, without fail, require a lot of money and time to sustain and grow. The wealth gap explored earlier highlights who, generally, has a better chance of becoming a successful developer and/or entrepreneur: those who already have access to capital, who may not be from the community where development is taking place, and are less likely to be people of color.

Yet, there are so many things that planners can do to level the playing field, and most of them revolve around creating greater access to the development process for people of color and other marginalized groups. Some barriers can include: is the municipal zoning code 800 pages? Are 40 off-site parking spaces required for 1,000 square feet of retail space? Does a plan review meeting cost thousands of dollars and take months to schedule? If it's *unreasonably* expensive and time-consuming to

do business, then it is also inherently inequitable, as only a well-resourced stratum of the population can afford the development process. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation's *Redevelopment Ready Communities* certification is a useful guide for understanding the accessibility of a municipality's processes and policies.

Other examples of inequitable practices might be even harder to see. Speculative landowners, for example, tend to tie up an asset and invest little to nothing, often leading to further deterioration of properties. In Detroit, the Illitch family is often accused of this exact practice; in fact, many see strategic speculation as a means by which entire neighborhoods were devalued and then assembled for what is now called 'The District'. The public sector may believe it can do little about this problem – as long as property owners pay their taxes, what interventions exist? Tools such as vacant property registries can help make speculation and inaction on the part of the property owner less comfortable. For example, in Wilmington, Delaware, the city assesses an annual fee on vacant property, which increases each year the property remains vacant. This practice returns commercial space to the market before it sits so long that it begins deteriorating.

Preserve What Works

Activation is so often the focus of economic development that it is easy to miss how important existing businesses are to local economies and the concept of ‘place’. Ensuring that existing entrepreneurs can sustain their businesses in the face of increased investment, higher rents, and market demand is key to a rising tide lifting all boats. No business lasts forever, but thoughtful engagement can help planners recognize which businesses are important cornerstones that may merit extra support.

That additional boost can take many forms – talking to older, established business owners about succession planning is a prevalent theme in Detroit. If possible, consider programs that are accessible by both business and property owners to incentivize the preservation of culturally relevant establishments. San Francisco’s Legacy Business Registry & Legacy Business Historical Preservation Fund allow a community to enjoy its economic cornerstones with municipal support. Legacy businesses are first identified by the community and added to a registry. Once on the registry, the business

and property owner are eligible for grants if current lease terms are extended to the business --a move which reinvests in the business, the property and helps preserve affordability.

Final Thoughts

To ensure that economic development is equitable, it’s important to start with the community and understand what kind of change, for them, is good change. Use this input to guide attraction and retention efforts, while employing data to intertwine market support. Remember that access to the public portions of the development process is key and, finally, that all of these efforts are not one-and-done. Economic development is a practice that, like urban planning, is iterative and dynamic. Keep the conversation going with an open door and an open mind.

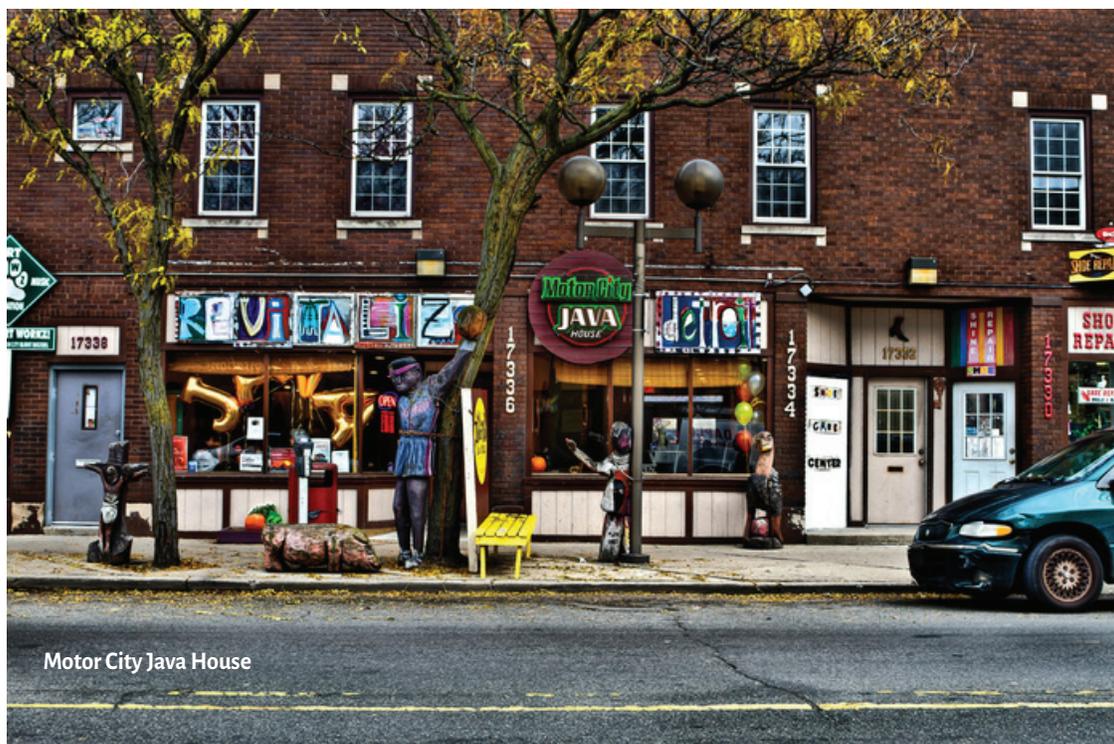
Martha Potere, AICP serves as Senior Small Business Strategy Manager for the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation. Martha specializes in community-based economic development and corridor revitalization, with experience rooted in the National Main Street Center and National Charrette Institute. 2020 marks her tenth year as a Detroitier and she is committed to ensuring that the city’s changing landscape stays welcoming for everyone.



RESOURCES

The Michigan Planner E-dition will have links to these sources:

- Nicolaci da Costa, Pedro. “America’s Humongous Wealth Gap Is Widening Further” *Forbes*. May 29, 2019
- Schermerhorn, Calvin. “Why the racial wealth gap persists, more than 150 years after emancipation” *Washington Post*. June 19, 2019.
- Center for Community Progress: *Vacant Spaces into Vibrant Place*
City and County of San Francisco, Office of Small Business, Legacy Business Program



Motor City Java House

How Well are We Planning for Equity?

The AICP Code of Ethics calls for planners to “seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration.” (AICP Code of Ethics, 2016).

Until now, there hasn’t been a benchmark to see how strongly Michigan municipalities are emphasizing such goals in their master plans. This past year, the MAP Social Equity Committee and I worked together to create an equity evaluation tool for master plans. It was (and still is) available to any planner, elected or appointed official, or member of the public interested in evaluating a plan.

Twenty-three communities completed the evaluation. We added a random sample of 25 other communities to see if the volunteer communities were different from the random group in any systematic way. We found that the volunteer communities and random sample communities are different in some important ways.

Words Matter

One of the first questions the survey asked was whether the words equity/equality/fairness/justice appeared anywhere in the plan. It is possible to have a plan with a strong equity focus without using these words, but it seemed more likely that plans that emphasized equity would actually use one of those words. About 48% of the volunteer communities and 20% of the random sample used one of these words in the sense of social equity (rather than equity in a property or criminal justice). Several of the plans used standard language from Complete Streets that references transportation equity. Two of the plans had entire chapters on equity and/or vulnerability.



Identify

One of the most fundamental ways we can incorporate equity into our master plans is to identify the most vulnerable people and/or neighborhoods in our communities and ensure that we are planning to meet their needs and improve their quality of life. We asked in the evaluation whether the plan identified groups of people or geographic areas that are underserved or that have particular social needs to be addressed.

One plan dug into census data pointing out that female-headed households in that community had the lowest median household income. Another plan noted the community’s higher unemployment rate and talked about how to help support people looking for jobs. Of the volunteer and random samples, more plans identified vulnerable groups than areas.

Goals and Implementation

The survey then asked about the inclusion of goals that would advance equity. For example, are there strategies to

help the most vulnerable people? While it is possible for a plan to contain strategies that would improve equity, yet not have explicit goals to that effect, it is less likely.

In planning, the most basic of all equity concerns is whether or not there is a place for disadvantaged people to live in a community, yet 36% of volunteer and 56% of random sample plans did not include a goal of affordable housing, workforce housing, and/or fair share housing.

Regarding environmental protection (air quality, noise mitigation, surface and stormwater quality), 52% of volunteer and 83% of

random sample plans did not mention environmental protection, in geographic areas that are underserved or that have particular needs. This is significant because we know that environmental issues are on average more likely to affect lower income areas and areas where racial minorities live.

The communities in the sample vary widely in their transportation systems (such as whether or not they have any

	Vulnerable groups		Vulnerable areas	
	Volunteer	Random	Volunteer	Random
Yes	48%	62.5%	41%	28%
No	52%	37.5%	59%	72%

public transportation) and their ability to affect those systems. None of the random sample plans and 30% of the volunteer plans mentioned improving transportation access for low income residents.

Conclusion

Overall, master plans could do a better job talking about equity, identifying underserved people and geographic areas in their communities, as well as incorporating goals to improve equity. Many plans did not even contain standard language about affordable housing. While values differ from community to community, planners and AICP-certified planners in particular

must engage their communities about why expanding choice and opportunity for all persons makes for stronger, healthier communities. If equity is a focus of the plan, we can expect it to be more likely the focus of resulting policies and ordinances.

Links to the equity evaluation tool will be included in next month's *Michigan Planner E-dition*.

MAP's Social Equity Committee is responsible for developing and maintaining MAP's Social Equity and Planning Fairness policy, recruiting more minorities to the field of planning; and advancing fairness concepts to planners and decision makers in Michigan.

Carolyn G. Loh is an associate professor in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at Wayne State University. A former planning consultant, her research interests include local land use decision making, the planning process, implementation, intergovernmental cooperation, and regional planning.



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Six Easy Ways to Incorporate Equity into a Master Plan

Many planners think that emphasizing equity in a master plan is difficult. It might not be a local priority and the planner may have been told to focus on other issues. It might involve change and it might involve redistribution, both of which can make residents nervous. However, it is not only a planner's responsibility to try to "plan for the needs of the disadvantaged," according to the AICP Code of Ethics, it is also the right thing to do to strengthen the community.

Areas with high or concentrated poverty, poor access to transportation, lack of housing choices, or environmental problems are not resilient: even if those problems don't appear to affect everyone, they ultimately will. A community where everyone has the opportunity to do well and whose residents shoulder the burden of problem-solving together will be better able to cope with change and issues as they arise: equity is not a zero-sum game.

Here are some ways local governments of any size can increase equity through master plans.

1. **Find out who lives in the community.** Most of the plans in the equity study included some kind of demographic analysis, but many left out race and income from that analysis. A few of the plans made an extra effort in their demographic analysis to identify socially vulnerable people, but most did not. Not one of the plans we evaluated mentioned rural poverty, which is certainly an issue in many Michigan townships. The next Michigan Planner E-edition will have links to data that communities of any size can access for demographic information.
2. **Find out where the most vulnerable people in the community live.** Perhaps the community has a low poverty rate, but most of the low-income people are



Farnsworth Street
by Multi Media

concentrated in one neighborhood. Or perhaps in another community neighborhoods where minority residents live tend to be less well-provided with community facilities. The locations where vulnerable people live matter when trying to address inequities and improve access to services and quality of life. Local knowledge and census data combined can bring this information to light.

Make sure the community's full range of diversity is represented in the planning process. Only one plan in the study mentioned any efforts to engage historically marginalized people in the planning process. The plan cannot claim to represent community consensus if the process leaves many people out. What does diversity look like in a community? Perhaps the community is very racially or ethnically diverse. Perhaps it is mostly white but has quite a bit of income diversity. Diversity looks different in different places, but whatever it means to a community, that is who should be at the table during the planning process.

3. **If the traditional methods of getting public participation only gather the input of certain swaths of the population, planners and officials need to be more creative.** Community engagement or public participation processes can be expensive, but volunteers can help. Volunteers can visit local institutions and groups to gather input or recruit volunteers from those institutions themselves. This recommendation is probably the hardest, but it is also the most important: all other equity efforts should flow from participation.
4. **Talk about housing.** Who is having trouble finding housing in this community? What do they need? This goal and its objectives will look different in different places. Perhaps a lack of affordable housing in general is a problem, or perhaps affordability isn't an issue, but a lack of housing options for seniors to age in place is. One plan recommended allowing accessory dwelling units so that seniors could house a caregiver or move into the accessory dwelling unit

themselves while renting out their main residence. Every master plan can be expected to have a goal about providing a variety of housing types to accommodate all ages and income levels.

5. **Talk about hazards.** What are the natural hazards in this community? Is climate change exacerbating them or is it likely to? Are some people more likely to be affected by them than others? How can the plan move in the direction of ensuring equitable protection from hazards? Coastal communities are already paying attention to these issues, but other communities must also do so.

6. **Talk about transportation access.** Cities with transit should analyze if some neighborhoods have less access to transit (and find out who lives in those neighborhoods). Rural communities may not have any transit, but they do have the ability to do non-motorized planning. One rural community's plan talked about Rural Complete Streets, that have wide, paved shoulders or accompanying bike paths. That recommendation could go in any rural plan and be implemented over time.

Some plans are already emphasizing equity. Livingston County's master plan, which received two MAP Planning Excellence Awards in 2019, has a Social Equity chapter. The City of Bridgman's Master Plan has a chapter called "Defining Vulnerability in the Bridgman Community." Yet many communities have not looked at planning explicitly through an equity lens. Put more simply, plans haven't asked: how can we help the most vulnerable people in our community?

The recommendations outlined above have low political and financial costs and can be a community's first steps toward a more equitable future. By making sure no one is left behind, the community at large prospers.



Carolyn G. Loh is an associate professor in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at Wayne State University. A former planning consultant, her research interests include local land use decision making, the planning process, implementation, intergovernmental cooperation, and regional planning.



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Planning Internships

A Win-Win for Organizations and Students

Did you know that the Michigan Association of Planning allows organizations to post internship openings free of charge? Last year, Gibbs Planning Group, the City of Holland, as well as the cities of Big Rapids, Detroit and Grand Rapids took advantage of this service. Read below to see how hiring a planning intern can advance your organization.

City of Holland

Summer, part-time, paid interns are vital to the City of Holland's urban planning functions and enables staff to mentor a student or a recent graduate. The internship allows them to apply their education in the real world and learn more about planning while helping the City meet its short and long-term planning goals. Projects have included organizing public outreach events, designing outreach materials, compiling a Development Guide, conducting administrative site plan reviews and inspections, GIS projects, and completing administrative tasks while working closely with the Senior Planner.

In order to ensure that the experience is valuable to both the intern and city staff, staff maintains an intern To Do list throughout the year and makes sure to customize the tasks to meet the interests of the individual. Holland found that calling on references as well as having a thorough interview process to assess knowledge, work habits, and interest is crucial.

Gibbs Planning Group

Gibbs Planning Group (GPG) is always looking for the brightest and best talent — individuals who are creative, digitally savvy and can bring new ideas to the table. One way GPG continues to grow as a company is through the lessons learned

from college interns. Since 1989, more than 50 students have participated in the program, with many of them moving on to prominent positions in city planning, architectural firms and planning agencies. Along with teaching students what a career in urban planning can look like, in return they introduce us to new technical skills and design trends that keep us up-to-date with the changing landscape, a valuable contribution which is essential to keeping the company innovative and successful.

The 10-week, paid internship program — available to students studying architecture, urban planning and liberal arts — guarantees real-world experience that students cannot get solely from studying. Interns are treated like members of the company, attending most client meetings and project presentations. They are expected to show off their urban planning or architecture skills by creating a planning, design or research project that can later be used for their CV or portfolios. Interns are also required to write an article suitable for publishing in a professional journal or magazine.

Planning internship postings are at www.planningmi.org/internships.

Jenna Elswick is the Senior Planner for the City of Holland. She has Masters Degrees in both Urban and Regional Planning and in Conflict Resolution, a specialization in transportation planning, and 15 years of experience working domestically and abroad. In addition to focusing on everything city planning, Jenna is engaged in researching and advocating for zoning techniques that will increase housing choice and ultimately affordability.



Holland
MICHIGAN

Robert J. Gibbs, AICP, ASLA, is considered one of the foremost urban retail planners in America. For more than two decades, his expertise has been sought by some of the most respected mayors, renowned architects, and successful real-estate developers in the country. Profiled in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Urban Land*, Gibbs has, writes *The Atlantic Monthly*, "a commercial sensibility unlike anything possessed by the urban planners who usually design downtown-renewal efforts."

Gibbs
Planning Group



Look for resources from MAP in the coming months that will help you continue your work, from recommended remote work platforms to making the case for planning as an essential service.

Three of Michigan's Planning Leaders Receive FAICP

Induction to the AICP College of Fellows is the highest honor the American Institute of Certified Planners bestows upon a member. Fellows of AICP are nominated and selected by their peers to recognize and honor their outstanding contributions as a professional planner. The outcomes of their individual efforts left demonstrably significant and transformational improvements

to the field of planning and the communities they served. All Fellows are long-time members of AICP and have achieved excellence in professional practice, teaching and mentoring, research, and community service and leadership. MAP is thrilled that three of our planning leaders have received this prestigious recognition from the American Planning Association.



M. Rory Bolger, PhD, AICP

Well before Dr. Bolger began his 33-year career as a planner, his work as a Peace Corps/Panama volunteer and years with CDCs in Detroit launched him on a trajectory of public service. His ability to craft land use regulation and explain the nuts and bolts of zoning (in two languages) have helped empower community voices and strike a responsible balance between spirited entrepreneurs and under-resourced neighborhoods. Skilled at hearing sometimes-complementary, sometimes-conflicting argument, Rory is effective at distilling it into understandable prose and reducing that to enforceable legislation. He has authored/edited the majority of Detroit's zoning text amendments since 1986.



Richard K. Carlisle, AICP

Having served hundreds of Michigan communities as a planning consultant for forty years, Dick was the guiding influence in the merger of the Michigan Association of Planning and the Michigan Society of Planning Officials, resulting in one of the largest chapters in the country. Dick has served as Michigan's leader in advocating for both the profession and local government, speaking for legislation reform and against dilution of local control. Dick realizes that community building extends beyond the profession as a strong advocate for people with disabilities by forming support organizations and leading Michigan's campaign to expand the Best Buddies program.



John Iacoangeli, AICP

John Iacoangeli's planning career can be summed up in two words: transformational and transferable. As a hands-on planner, he recognizes the importance of community inclusion, using the opportunity to educate participants on the value of planning with an eye toward achievable results and preparing them to transform their community. His work has focused on rural and urban municipalities of the Central Great Lakes Region, transferring his knowledge to younger planning professionals, planning commissions, and elected officials to shape planning outcomes across the region. John has also served his home community as mayor, councilmember, and board member on several commissions.



John, Dick and Rory join the ranks of Michigan's other FAICP's: Mary Ann Heidemann, Zenia Kotval, Robert W. Marans, James A. Segedy, James E. Tischler, Norman R. Tyler, Cynthia E. Winland, and Mark A. Wyckoff. *Congratulations!*

Testing the Practical Difficulty of Non-use Variances, Part One

One of the several unique responsibilities of the zoning board of appeals (ZBA) is to hear variance requests. A variance is a license to use or improve property in a way not permitted under an ordinance. A ZBA must consider variances carefully.

There are two types of variances: non-use and use. A non-use variance (sometimes called a dimensional variance) is a variance request that does not deal with the use of the property. A non-use variance may pertain to building setback, lot area, building height, lot width, landscaping, signs, or other development standards.

As deemed by the Michigan Courts, a proof of **practical difficulty** is the key criteria for an applicant to qualify for a non-use variance. This means the zoning board of appeals must find that the applicant has demonstrated a practical difficulty by satisfying four mandatory tests.

This article is the first in a four part series that will examine these four tests in depth.

The first test to determine a practical difficulty is: *Are the regulations unreasonably restrictive? Would conformity with the code(s) be unreasonably burdensome?*

Before determining that a code is unreasonably restrictive, consider alternatives. Any report furnished by staff, consultant, or other individuals should contain possible alternatives.

When visiting the site (see Site Visit box) or looking at the site on Google Maps, look for information that may not be included in the report.

After the site visit, consider other data that may be informative to deliberation.

For example,

- If the applicant claims he needs a taller pole barn than what is permitted in order to store a recreational vehicle, go measure a typical recreational vehicle. Is the applicant's proposal = the minimum size needed to store such a vehicle?
- If the applicant claims he needs a 5-foot setback variance in order to build a new house, consider how much 5 feet is really going to matter. Could the house be constructed somewhere else on the parcel without a variance?
- If the applicant claims he needs a setback variance to build an attached garage to his house, consider if a detached garage could be built without a variance.

When considering alternatives, remember that the ZBA cannot consider financial hardship. The ZBA should consider alternatives, even if they are more expensive. Consideration of alternatives brings perspective to the terms "unreasonably restrictive and burdensome" and enables a more objective conclusion to be reached.

Check back in May/June 2020 for the next installment of **Testing the Practical Difficulty of Non-Use Variances**. The Michigan Association of Planning Zoning Board of Appeals Training module offers a 2.5-hour deep dive into all of the Zoning Board of Appeals responsibilities. Contact Amy Vansen, Director of Information and Programs if you would like to schedule a workshop.

SITE VISITS

Does the variance application in your community include written permission for ZBA members to visit the property? If so, then visit the site. Seeing the property can be revealing and helpful to the meeting's deliberation. While seeing the property is helpful, be cautious of any exparte contact with the applicant.

It is best to avoid contact, but if it cannot be helped, here are some tips on your interaction with the applicant: don't agree or disagree about the ordinance, don't comment on the case, don't answer questions (refer them to staff), and don't ask questions (ask staff).

At the end of the visit, record the visit as best as possible (write down any comments) and most importantly disclose that information at the ZBA meeting. *Remember each decision maker (ZBA member) must have the same information on which to base their decision.*

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