INCLUSIVE DESIGN TOOLKIT

ZONING TOOLS TO CREATE INCLUSIVE, ACCESSIBLE, AND WELCOMING COMMMUNITIES

American Planning Association
Michigan Chapter
Creating Great Communities for All

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Inclusive Design Toolkit was developed through a partnership between the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP) and Disability Network Michigan (DNM), with funding provided by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA). This resource sets to empower municipal planners, elected officials, and various stakeholders to make the necessary regulatory and policy changes to create a built environment that is inclusive and welcoming to all. It provides a range of tools communities can use to experience the social and economic benefits of inclusivity.

The Problem

Michigan communities face a crisis of housing accessibility and affordability, driven by a rapidly aging population and restrictive zoning regulations. While one in four people will experience a disability during their lifetime, less than one percent of housing in the United States is readily accessible to those who use wheelchairs. Outdated zoning ordinances can perpetuate exclusion through unfavorable restrictions and regulations that drive up costs and limit housing diversity. These barriers disproportionately affect residents with disabilities, who are already more likely to face economic hardships.

The Solution

The toolkit advocates for shifting from minimum legal compliance to Inclusive Design: A proactive approach that integrates the needs of diverse users early in the planning process. It outlines specific zoning tools and reforms to remove regulatory barriers, including:

Modernizing Zoning Ordinances: Updating definitions such as “family” to accommodate non-traditional households and enabling accessibility features, such as ramps, to encroach into setbacks without requiring variances.

Expanding Housing Diversity: Permitting “Missing Middle” housing types (e.g., duplexes, townhomes) and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) to increase the supply of affordable, accessible options.

Leveraging Processes: Updating or adopting a set of procedures with variances and Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) to promote accessible units and community benefits, and adopting pre-approved building plans to streamline the approval of inclusive housing.

Recommendations

To create communities that are livable for residents of all ages and abilities, municipalities must move beyond the status quo. We recommend that decision makers:

Engage Disability Advocates: Include the disability community and advocates as key stakeholders from the very beginning of the planning process.

Audit and Amend: Review current master plans and zoning ordinances to identify and remove exclusionary barriers identified in this toolkit.

Make Inclusivity the Standard: Adopt tools such as pre-approved plans and density bonuses to encourage developers to build accessible-ready housing.

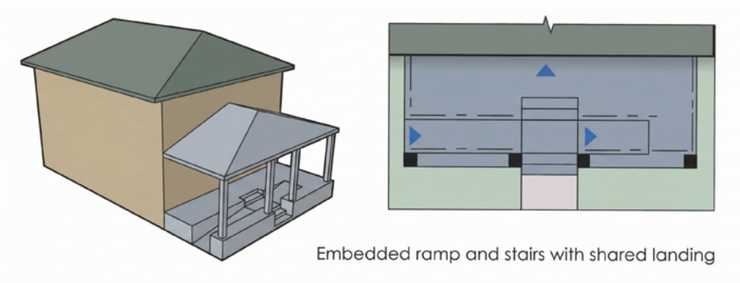

Figure i.1: Ramps and stairs: Two of many components to consider for inclusive design (Image from Inclusive Housing: A Pattern Book by The Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access)

Next Steps

The Planning and Zoning Toolkit for Inclusive Design gives the regulatory framework, but regulations do not implement themselves. Municipal leaders must take ownership of these ideas, actively partner with the disability community, and push for a culture that values inclusive design over minimum compliance.

To move forward, it is essential to immediately educate planners and officials so they have the vocabulary and technical skills to update their master plans and codes. Targeted guides must be developed for specific challenges, such as accessible transportation, housing, and signage. Additionally, long-term state reforms are necessary to resolve conflicting building codes, secure funding, modernize the Open Meetings Act, and build upon the minimum requirements of the American Disabilities Act of 1990.

Introduction to the Toolkit

The Inclusive Design Partnership

The Michigan Association of Planning (MAP) and Disability Network Michigan (DNM) worked in partnership to develop this collection of resources to support local government implementation of inclusive design solutions to create more accessible public and private spaces. The purpose of this project is to empower municipal professionals like city planners and city managers, along with elected and appointed officials, to make the planning, policy and regulatory changes necessary to create a built environment that is inclusive and welcoming to all; that provides them with a range of tools that can be customized to local conditions; and to amplify the value of an inclusive community and the social and economic benefits that result.

It further serves design professionals, non-profits, and community development and housing stakeholders through the complementary Design Guide which offers multiple inclusive design plans for kitchens and bathrooms that can be included in single family homes, all levels of multi-family homes, and individual apartment units; and a one-hour video course on the basics of inclusive design and residential construction.

It will take an integrated approach, across many disciplines – planning, architecture, urban design, and engineering – to solve the myriad challenges faced by people with disabilities and this initiative will go a long way towards bringing various stakeholders together to create more accessible and welcoming communities across the state for all; enhance understanding of the need; and amplify the call for a cross disciplinary approach.

The Partners

Disability Network Michigan/Centers for Independent Living are consumer-driven, community-based, disability organizations that promote independence and self-determination for people with disabilities. They are consumer driven because people with disabilities form a majority of their governing boards, as well as a majority of their staff, and a majority of individuals in decision making positions. They are "community" because they are conceived and operated by persons with disabilities within their local communities.

The Michigan Association of Planning (MAP) is a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to promoting sound community planning that benefits the residents of Michigan. The Michigan Association of Planning exists so that Michigan will consist of healthy, safe, attractive, and successful communities built first and foremost on quality community planning. MAP promotes quality community planning through education, information and advocacy statewide.

Project Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this project is to equip municipal planners and other professionals, and elected and appointed officials, with the tools and resources they need to make regulatory changes that will make building accessible and accommodating homes and spaces reachable.

The objective of this project is to create more accessible and welcoming communities for all across the state; enhance understanding of the need; amplify the responsibility of local government policy response; and identify necessary next steps outside of local government purview to create truly accessible places for all.

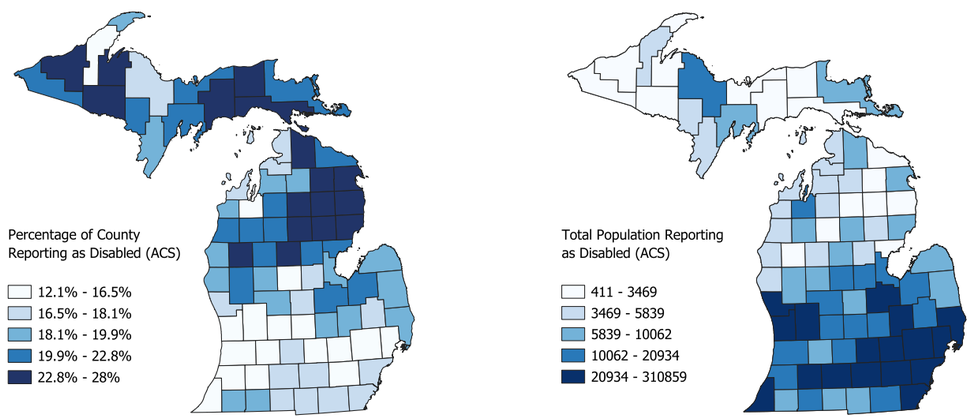

Figure 1.1: Percentage and total number of county population with one or more disabilities (Data source: American Community Survey 2019-2023)

Background and Context

The built environment presents many barriers to people with disabilities including access to housing, transportation options, and social connections. These barriers affect livability, economic prosperity, and quality of life. Zoning and other municipal regulations can directly or indirectly affect these issues, making it harder or easier to create livable communities for all.

In recent years, there has been an increased awareness of the need for accessibility and welcoming of persons with disabilities. This awareness stems from the changing perceptions of ability experienced by more active seniors as they age, the increased presence of persons with disabilities participating in the community, and the heightened awareness of the barriers that prevent accessibility.

Improvements that many do not give a second thought to, such as closed captioning on television, curb cuts and sidewalk ramps, or voice activated devices, were originally created as accommodations for disabilities. And yet, everyone from children pedaling bicycles and parents pushing strollers, to people in wheelchairs or with cognitive impairments, benefit from curb cuts. Talk to text or ordering Siri to do something makes life easier for everyone.

The concept of Complete Streets (first launched in 2004) looked at developing streets that are universal and designed for everyone: pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, and public transit users of all ages and abilities. Likewise, the non-profit organization 8 to 80 Cities is guided by the principle that if everything in a community is great for an 8 year old and an 80 year old, then it will be better for all people.

Why this Project Now?

One in four people will experience a disability during their life. Of those, most will have challenges with limited mobility. But less than one percent of all housing in the United States is readily accessible to people who use wheelchairs or have difficulty managing stairs.

While people with disabilities face barriers to transportation, jobs, and access to day-to-day needs like health care and groceries, obtaining affordable and accessible housing is probably the most critical need, and when solved for, can alleviate many other challenges.

The price of a new house has become less attainable for most Michigan residents. But disabled Michigan residents are more likely to live in poverty. In 2019, 21.6% of disabled people were considered poor under the Census's Supplemental Poverty Measure, compared with just over 10 % of people without disabilities. While the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits employers from discriminating

on the basis of disability, in 2020, workers with disabilities (ages 18–64) were paid, on average, 74 cents for every dollar paid to their nondisabled peers.

Nationally, in 2021, nearly 40% of renters with any disability experienced housing insecurity—meaning they were struggling to pay their rent—compared with a national average of 25%.

These realities, coupled with Michigan's rapidly aging population, result in a growing crisis of fewer and fewer affordable and accessible homes.

Inclusive design has benefits for everyone over the course of their lifetime. By contemporizing plans and codes, communities will remove barriers that affect livability, economic prosperity, quality of life, and fairness.

Local zoning and development regulations can make it harder or easier to create a livable community for all. Planners already know that more equitable access to housing, transportation, and social connections positively impact everyone and make great communities for all. Identifying discrete policies and regulations that most municipalities have adopted can show planners how these policies and regulations hinder and aggravate accessibility.

This toolkit is designed to be responsive to community needs based on capacity, community goals and other local factors. It should be used to help communities understand where they are and what actions to take to increase accessibility and inclusiveness.

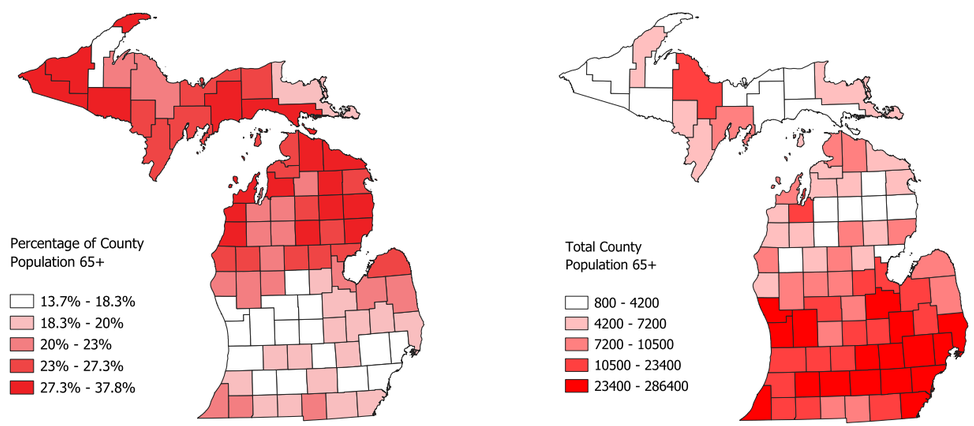

Figure 1.2: Percentage and number of county population 65 years or older (Data source: American Community Survey 2019-2023)

Who this Toolkit is For

While this toolkit was primarily created to equip municipal planners and other professionals, and elected and appointed officials, with the tools and resources they need to make regulatory changes, other parties also have a role.

Officials: Whether elected or appointed, officials are leaders in their community. Officials set policy and adopt laws, but in the smallest of Michigan communities they also review the simplest of site plans. Their acumen and priorities matter.

Planners: A planner's role connects governmental operations with the technical reality of construction and the needs of the people they serve. With an eye toward accessibility and inclusion, planners work includes reviewing and writing plans and ordinances, to advocating for equitable engagement efforts, to ensuring development proposals meet ordinance standards.

Other Municipal Staff: Officials, inspectors, plan reviewers and clerks are often the only personnel reviewing barrier free retrofits to homes and are responsible for ensuring that barrier free construction code requirements are met. Their knowledge and responsibilities are unique in the area of inclusive design. As such, they have opportunities to work with other partners, including planners, developers, and builders to make better decisions that will increase future accessibility.

Developers:. In today's market, building successfully requires more than just construction—it requires strategic engagement, financial ingenuity, and a commitment to inclusive design. By implementing a proactive strategy, developers can maximize profitability, secure community support, and future-proof their developments. Developers can establish themselves as forward-thinking community partners and capture untapped markets through inclusive design. By a focus on leveraging grants, controlling costs, advocating for sensible regulations, and designing inclusively—developers move beyond simple construction to become the developer building the successful, adaptable communities of tomorrow.

Non-Profits and Other Advocates: Advocates can be community development professionals, social service organizations, other nonprofits, or citizens. Their role is to educate about, advocate for, and champion accessibility. In order to do this, they must know and understand the ordinances and policies in their community, and reach out to those responsible for reviewing, approving, and executing plans, ordinances, and developments.

How to Use This Toolkit

The Toolkit is divided into four sections:

Community Engagement and Outreach

Public outreach and community engagement is how government communicates important information and also asks for input into important decisions. The spectrum of participation runs from informing to consulting to empowering, and all along the way that communication must be accessible. This section reviews the legal requirements and guidelines for making all forms of communication from website design to meeting agendas to meeting format, accessible.

Planning

The Planning section reviews the components of a master plan and how to look at those components with a lens toward accessibility and inclusive design. Likewise, the importance of plan alignment with other adopted community plans is described.

Zoning Tools

The toolkit identifies 9 zoning regulations that affect accessibility, how community members can play a role in making changes, provides a successful case study (or studies) where it already has been implemented, and how the recommendation relates to Redevelopment Ready Communities principles or MSHDA Housing Plan goals.

Other Ordinances

This section includes locally developed and adopted ordinances (and one tool) as well as those developed by the state of Michigan and adopted locally by reference. It identifies how these regulations affect accessibility, how community members can play a role in making changes and provides a successful case study (or studies) if changes have been made in other communities.

Universal Design vs. Inclusive Design

Universal Design and Inclusive Design are terms that are often used interchangeably, but they are in fact different approaches to create more accessible products and environments. Both seek to reduce exclusionary practices by promoting the creation of accessible, diverse, and user-focused results, and to focus on accessibility and inclusivity through design.

Accessibility

Accessibility has become a legal term, and the ADA Standards for Accessible Design specify what is required for a building or facility to be physically accessible to people with disabilities.

What the ADA identifies as accessible may or may not be optimally accessible for an individual. Codes are a minimum and often require a one-size-fits-all approach that does not address individual needs. Often the ADA is an afterthought and used as a checklist to meet the minimum standards, after the building or street or neighborhood has been designed, rather than using the requirements (and intent) to spur better design at the outset. For example, an elevator, which is required in all public multistory buildings, may be in a location that is difficult to find—or even hidden behind a secured door. The owner met the letter of the law--they provided access to all public floors. But the spirit of the law has certainly fallen short: People who need the elevator, for whatever reason, cannot easily access other public floors of the building.

Universal Design

Universal Design was originated by Ronald Mace, an architect and product designer, in the 1970s. Ronald was also a wheelchair user from the age of 9 due to contracting polio. Universal Design includes seven principles:

1. Equitable Use – The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

2. Flexibility in Use – The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

3. Simple and Intuitive Use – Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or education level.

4. Perceptible information – The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

5. Tolerance for Error – The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

6. Low Physical Effort – The design can be used efficiently and comfortably with a minimum of fatigue.

7. Size and Space for Approach and Use – Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

Under Universal Design principles, the design of products, environments, programs and services should be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. While this single solution is intended to accommodate as many users as possible, some will inevitably be left out. The definition also emphasizes the **end goal of a design** instead of the process of getting to the ideal design.

Inclusive Design

Inclusive Design is described by Kat Holmes, author of Mismatch: How Inclusion Shapes Design (Simplicity: Design, Technology, Business, Life), as a methodology that enables and draws on the full range of human diversity. Most importantly, it encourages including and learning from people with a broad range of perspectives to recognize and overcome biases that build exclusion into design. Rather than designers designing for stakeholders, the Inclusive Design approach designs with stakeholders.

Inclusive design is not new. Some municipalities in Michigan and nationally have already integrated inclusive design regulations into codes, and policies into plans. But it must become a universally embraced and implemented feature of our municipal codes and plans. Inclusive design has evolved over time, as understanding

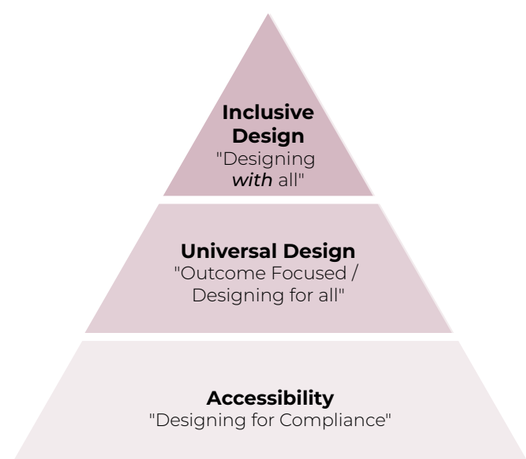

Figure 2.1: Inclusive Design vs. Universal Design vs. Accessibility.

increases about our responsibilities to create public and private spaces that meet the needs of every resident. We've also come to better understand that inclusive design has benefits for everyone over the course of their lifetime, whether they experience a physical or cognitive disability they were born with, acquired through injury, or simply the natural aging process that will affect almost every one of us at some point.

Inclusive Design places people at the heart of the design process. It acknowledges a wide diversity of different needs including wheelchair users, sensory impairments, learning difficulties, mental health, hidden impairments, and the needs of children and parents. It acknowledges the need for adaptability in design to meet different needs at different stages and strives to create convenient and enjoyable places for everyone. It seeks to accommodate all people regardless of their age, gender, mobility, ethnicity or circumstances.

Planners and planning adjacent professionals, such as zoning administrators, building officials, and city/township/village managers, should understand the spirit and the intent of the ADA and advocate for greater accessibility.

Universal design strives to consider everyone at the beginning of the design process. And inclusive design strives to have people with physical, cognitive and mental health disabilities in the room with the architects and engineers at the beginning of the design process.

The **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** turned 35 in 2025, and while many things have changed for the better that benefit all Americans, including closed captioning, automatic doors, and sidewalk curb cuts, there is still much work to do.

Legal Framework

Homes, neighborhoods, and communities in Michigan are designed and built following a sometimes-confusing confluence of federal, state, and local laws. The Michigan Residential Code (MRC), the Michigan Building Code (MBC), a community's local ordinances, the Federal Fair Housing Act (FHA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) all have a role to play when assessing building permits. Some of these laws trump others and this hierarchy impacts how much a local municipality can require of private development.

Being more knowledgeable about housing, construction and zoning laws provides an opportunity to advocate for more inclusive design, even if the law (for now) does not require it.

Federal Laws

Fair Housing Act

In 1968, the Civil Rights Act, commonly known as the Fair Housing Act, was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Fair Housing Act:

- Prohibits discrimination concerning the sale, rental and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, sex, and family status.
- Prohibits zoning ordinances from containing provisions that treat uses such as affordable housing, supportive housing, or group homes for people with disabilities differently than other similar uses.
- Prohibits ordinances from enforcing more strictly against the above noted types of housing uses. For example, a blight ordinance that is being inconsistently enforced depending on who lives in a house would violate the Fair Housing Act

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law by President George H. W. Bush. It added further protections for people with disabilities in housing and other areas. It amended the Fair Housing Act to include those protections for people with disabilities. Further, employers, state and local governments, businesses that are open to the public, commercial facilities, transportation providers, and telecommunication companies were also required to follow the requirements of the ADA. The ADA guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to

enjoy employment options, purchase goods and services, and participate in state and local government programs.

Standards for Accessible Design

The Standards for Accessible Design (ADA 2010) are federal standards that set the minimum requirements for creating accessible facilities and spaces to ensure equal access for individuals with disabilities in commercial facilities, public accommodations, and state and local government facilities.

Historic Preservation vs. Barrier Free Access

Access to historically significant properties that are open to the public is mandated by federal law. Historic properties are not exempt from the ADA and must be made as accessible as non-historic buildings "To the greatest extent possible".

The requirement to provide access is triggered in several ways:

1. **Ongoing Responsibility:** Owners of "public accommodations" (such as private museums, theaters, and retail shops) are required under Title III of the ADA to make "readily achievable" changes on an ongoing basis. Existing buildings are subject to anyone filing a complaint of an ADA violation to the DOJ. The impact on designated Historic Structure can be considered in the DOJ review.
2. **During Alterations:** Specific, often more extensive, accessibility requirements are triggered when alterations, including restoration and rehabilitation work, are made to a historic property.
3. **Federal Connection:** Buildings designed, constructed, or altered by the Federal Government or with federal assistance must be accessible under the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968. Additionally, recipients of federal financial assistance must make their programs and activities accessible under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
4. **Government Facilities:** State and local government facilities whose main purpose is historic preservation (like State-owned historic museums) must give priority to physical accessibility under Title II of the ADA.

State Laws

Planning Enabling Act

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA) was adopted in 2008. Its predecessors (the Municipal Planning Act, the County Planning Act, and the Township Planning Act), were adopted in 1931, 1945, and 1959, respectively. Until 2024, the MPEA did not specify housing as a plan element, and stipulated only that one purpose of the plan is to provide for "population distribution," and that a community allocate land for residences, along with many other land uses. The term used above --"along with"-- points to planning's key role in connecting and balancing the parts of the whole (housing, businesses, recreation, and infrastructure).

The 2024 Michigan Planning Enabling Act was amended and stipulated that:

- A community's master plan must provide for a range of housing types, costs, affordability, attainability, ages, and other characteristics, including single- and multiple-family dwellings, to serve the housing demands of a diverse population.
- Housing expertise will be included on the list of desired qualifications in the Planning Commission.
- A community must assess and consider its existing and forecasted housing demands when making recommendations.

Planning plays a key role in connecting and balancing housing needs with other interconnected land uses like business and industry, open space and recreation, and roads and infrastructure. The new Housing Element provision provides clarity and also emphasizes housing explicitly as an issue that must be considered, like transportation and utilities.

Zoning Enabling Act

The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEA) was adopted in 2006. Its predecessors, the City and Village Zoning Act, the County Zoning Act, and the Township Zoning Act were adopted in 1921, 1943, and 1945, respectively.

Housing is mentioned very briefly in the MZEA. It stipulates that one purpose of regulating land is to ensure that local units of government meet the needs of the state's citizens by zoning enough land for residential use to avoid overcrowding. It also requires the following:

- State-licensed residential care facilities must be treated as a residential use of property and a permitted use in all residential zones. They cannot be subject to a different permit or procedure

than a dwelling of similar density. State licensed residential care facilities are defined in the MZEA.

- Zoning shall not have the effect of totally prohibiting a land use in the presence of a demonstrated need for that land use within either that local unit of government or the surrounding area.

Elliot-Larsson Civil Rights Act

In 1976, the Elliot-Larson Civil Rights Act was enacted in Michigan. This State of Michigan Civil Rights law prohibited discriminatory practices, policies, and customs based upon religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, familial status, or marital status. Also in 1976, the State of Michigan signed the Michigan Persons with Disabilities Civil Rights Act into law. This added protections originally adopted by the federal government in the Fair Housing Act.

The State Construction Code Act

The Michigan Building Code Act 230 of 1972 was amended in 1999 to create the Stille-DeRossett-Hale Single State Construction Code Act. This action created a single state building, electrical, plumbing and mechanical code for the State of Michigan. There are two different codes that regulate housing construction and renovation in the state. The Michigan Residential Code applies to detached dwellings, attached dwellings (townhouses), and duplexes (two-units). The Michigan Building Code applies to all other types of housing.

Michigan Building Code

The Michigan Building Code requires accessible dwelling units to be provided in buildings containing four or more units if such buildings have one or more elevators and all ground floor dwelling units in other buildings contain four or more units. The Michigan Residential Code does not require detached dwellings, townhouses (up to three attached in a building), or duplexes to be accessible, nor does it require renovations of these residences to become accessible.

Impacts to Municipalities

Municipalities are not required to adopt a zoning ordinance, but if they do, it must be based upon an adopted master plan that meets the requirements of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. However, there is no state oversight on the content of a local master plan or zoning ordinance. Plans and ordinances may be ruled invalid by a court if a municipality is sued, and if the court finds that state law was not followed.

Land use policies, including zoning regulations, procedures and enforcement, may be considered discriminatory if it can be proven that they have a disproportionate impact on minorities, families with children, or people with disabilities. Policies or ordinances could include any of the following:

- Density or design requirements that make residential development prohibitively expensive
- Prohibitions on multifamily housing (like duplexes, townhouses, or apartments)
- Limiting households to four or fewer unrelated adults

Senior housing is the one exception where housing can be limited to an exclusive group. Senior housing is defined as housing where 80% of the units are occupied by at least one person over the age of 55 or 100% of the occupants are age 62 or older.

Unlike planning and zoning, communities cannot "opt out" of having construction codes apply in their community. Municipalities may choose to not hire staff or consultants to enforce the construction codes, but in those cases, the county or state will enforce construction codes in accordance with state law. Local governments may choose to administer and enforce the state-wide building code, but cannot adopt their own regulations.

The Planning and Zoning Toolkit for Inclusive Design includes a number of strategies to elevate the local and statewide conversation to reform local comprehensive plans, capital improvement plans, ordinances, and policies.

Readers will note that some of the strategies outlined in the Toolkit will fall short since the Michigan Residential Code does not require renovated or newly constructed single and two family dwellings to be accessible. More conversations and advocacy with state leaders are needed to make this a requirement.

Community Engagement and Outreach

Planning is for everyone. Planning and zoning impacts everyone, and municipal plans and ordinances should reflect the needs and perspectives of all community members, and especially those historically excluded from participating in public processes. Adopting proactive, comprehensive and inclusive public participation processes that go beyond the minimum required by law will result in outcomes that truly address the needs of all residents. Even well designed and executed processes have gaps and must be adjusted to assure that broad representation among marginalized and vulnerable people are intentionally and meaningfully included. Physical access, advance planning, and attentive facilitation can have transformative impacts.

The first step a municipality can take is to adopt inclusive planning and zoning best practices. There are many ways to meet legal public notice requirements, but going beyond will ensure accessibility and equity.

Outreach to Disability Advocates

It is important to engage with disability advocates and the disabled community early in the planning process, and consistently throughout. Consider this audience a key stakeholder and invite them to the

Figure 4.1: Involve disability advocates from the first step in the planning process: Visioning, goals, objectives (Image from American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service (PAS) 120)

initial master plan kick off events, to forums for visioning and goal-setting, to a focus group or listening session, and to plan implementation meetings. The stakeholder engagement list should include disabled people, disability organizations, and caregivers.

Required Community Engagement: The Minimums

Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 276 of 1976) and the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008) dictate how and to what extent public input and involvement is required. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) also has requirements for public meetings.

Here are the minimum requirements:

Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 276 of 1976)

- When a government body gathers to discuss or set policy, those meetings must be open to observers.
- Advance public notice of all meetings is required, including regular, special, rescheduled, or emergency meetings.
- Public participation must be allowed, and individuals have the right to address the public body within reasonable rules established by the body.
- Meeting minutes must be recorded and made available to the public, ensuring access to what was discussed and decided.
- Closed sessions are allowed only under specific circumstances, such as legal strategy or personnel matters, and cannot be used to avoid public scrutiny of planning decisions.

Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008)

- At least one public hearing is required before adoption or amendment of a master plan.
- Notice of the public hearing must be provided at least 15 days in advance, via publication in a newspaper of general circulation and mailed to stakeholders including neighboring jurisdictions, utilities, and transportation agencies.
- Draft master plans must be made available for public review prior to the hearing, and distributed to all identified entities with an opportunity for comment.
- Planning commissions must solicit and consider community input, recording comments and ensuring that stakeholder feedback is formally incorporated into the process.
- Intergovernmental coordination is mandated, as commissions must notify and obtain input from other local governments and agencies before final adoption.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

- Meetings must take place in physically accessible spaces.
- Communities must provide American Sign Language interpreters or captioning upon request.
- Communities must ensure that all digital platforms used are screen-reader compatible.

While these are necessary requirements, the legal minimums often fall short of true inclusivity.

Going Beyond the Minimum: Engagement

Provide accessibility beyond the physical building

What this looks like:

- Meeting room has space for wheelchair users to sit **with** the group (not off to the side)
- Parking lot includes legally designated accessible spaces that are not impeded
- Sidewalks and crosswalks are safe and present
- There is clear, easy-to-read signage inside the building
- Staff or volunteers available to direct attendees, especially in large or unfamiliar venues

Important: Always visit the venue in person to assess accessibility firsthand.

Offer virtual and in-person options (also known as hybrid format)

While it may be challenging to facilitate, in contrast to an in-person only meeting, offering a hybrid format creates equitable access by removing barriers related to mobility and geography.

What this looks like:

A well-run hybrid event allows participants to:

- Attend in person at an accessible venue
- OR join remotely through programs such as Zoom, Teams, or other live streaming platforms.
    - AND participate fully. Remote participants are able to ask questions, comment, and engage regardless of how they attend

Include accessible formats for people with visual or cognitive impairments

Including accessible formats means offering your materials in ways that are usable and understandable for people who may not be able to process standard printed or digital text.

What this looks like:

For people with visual impairments:

- Ensure digital documents (PDFs, Word, websites) are properly tagged for screen readers.
- Use real text and not scanned images of text.
- Use meaningful hyperlinks (e.g. "View the plan" instead of "Click here").
- Use high-contrast color schemes.
- Include documents with simple sentences and images/icons to support understanding.
- Use bullet points and plenty of white space to reduce visual clutter.
- Provide audio / video recordings of important documents or meeting summaries.

For people with cognitive or learning disabilities:

- Use short sentences and everyday words.
- Avoid planning jargon or legal terms.
- Format documents consistently so users can predict where to find key information.
- Use charts, timelines, or diagrams to explain complex processes.

Technology checklist for an inclusive hybrid event:

- Use a camera with a wide view to capture the speaker and presentation
- Use external microphones so virtual attendees can clearly hear
- Have a designated tech facilitator to manage chat, troubleshoot, and monitor virtual hands raised
- Ensure presentation slides are accessible and high-contrast
- Enable live closed captioning
- Provide instructions for how to request accommodations in advance
- Provide a live transcript and recording after the event
- Conduct a full technology test run
- Collect feedback to ensure accessibility needs are being met

Legal Notices: Zoning Board of Appeals, Rezoning, and Code Violations

Notices for public hearings, rezoning, or property maintenance issues are often mailed or posted, but they can be confusing or inaccessible.

Figure 4.2: A confusing notice of public hearing in Hempstead, New York (left) and The standard zoning notice sign used by the Cleveland City Planning Commission (right) (image from Cleveland City Planning Commission). Cities such as Raleigh and St. Louis have adapted similar public notice signs and a QR code to provide more information.

Design Considerations With Legal Notices and Meeting Handouts

Color

Is there enough contrast between the text and the background? For example, yellow text on white or light-colored paper can make important information hard to read. Stick with high-contrast combinations like black text on white or light-colored backgrounds.

Font size

Choose fonts that are at least 10-point in size. Sans-serif fonts are generally more readable on screens, especially for smaller text and short messages.

Font style

Choose clear, legible typefaces like Arial, Helvetica, or Times New Roman. Avoid script, condensed, or decorative fonts.

Layout

Is the notice formatted in a way that guides the reader's eye? Use clear section headers, bullet points, and adequate spacing between lines and paragraphs. Avoid packing too much text onto one page.

How to Offer Accessible Formats

Participants must be aware that these accessible formats are offered. This can be done by including wording in your notices or web contents such as:

"Materials are available in accessible formats upon request, including large print, audio, or plain language summaries. Contact [name] at [email/phone] to request."

Key techniques in *Plain English* by Natalie Macris

Challenge	Macris's Fix
Dense, technical language excludes the public	**Use plain language and real-life examples.** Say "sidewalks and crosswalks" instead of "pedestrian infrastructure." Avoid acronyms unless necessary.
Public notices are too formal or bureaucratic	**Write like a human, not a memo.** Macris recommends a friendly tone: "We want your ideas," and not "Public input is being solicited."
Key messages get buried in long text	**Lead with the point.** Start with what matters, e.g., "We're redesigning the intersection to make it safer for everyone." Keep sentences short and active.
People aren't sure how their feedback will be used	**Be transparent.** Macris stresses the importance of closing the loop: "You told us X. We're doing Y." Use plain summaries.
Processes and next steps are unclear	**Break things down into steps.** Use bullets, headers, and callouts. In everyday language, explain what people can do now and what happens next.

Location

If your community requires that signs be posted on a property, make sure signs are placed at a height and location for people of all abilities.

Making Your Website Truly Accessible

Websites are often the first place people look for information about the planning process. Make sure yours meets accessibility standards by using:

Alternative text (alt text) for all images

Why it's important for accessibility:

Alternative text (alt text) is a brief, descriptive label added to images on websites that allows screen readers to convey the content to users who are blind or visually impaired. Without alt text, you unintentionally exclude a proportion of your audience from participating.

How it works:

People who are blind or visually impaired often use screen readers (assistive software like NVDA, JAWS, or VoiceOver) to browse websites. When a screen reader encounters an image, it reads the alt text aloud, so the user understands what the image is conveying.

The alt text should:

- Describe the essential content or purpose of the image
- Be concise but informative
- Avoid saying "image of" or "picture of" as the screen reader will already identify it as an image

Provide content in multiple formats

Why it's important for accessibility:

Providing content in different formats ensures that regardless of ability, learning style, or access to technology, everyone can understand and engage with your materials. Different disabilities may require different formats (e.g. Blind users may need screen reader-friendly text and not just images, deaf users may need captions or transcripts for video/audio content, people with cognitive disabilities may benefit from simplified summaries or diagrams).

How it works:

Content in multiple formats include written text (PDFs, web pages, plain text), visuals (infographics, maps, slides), videos (with captions), among many others. Not everyone accesses information the same way but when residents see materials in formats they can use, they may be more likely to participate.

Community engagement content should:

- Avoid using scanned documents that are not OCR-readable (provide a screen-reader-accessible version of documents and not just a fancy flyer)
- Ensure forms and calendars are keyboard-navigable and screen-reader compatible
- Add captions and transcripts to videos

How accessible is your webpage? Test it out with the WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool

Some common issues:

- Missing or inaccurate alt text on images
- Poor color contrast between text and background (e.g. White colored-text on a yellow background)
- Improper heading structure (e.g. Not using headers)

Planning

For municipal officials and staff, community values provide the foundation for all actions—from routine decisions to major initiatives and project approvals. Although these values may not always be top of mind in day-to-day responsibilities, they consistently guide staff and leadership when significant or challenging decisions arise. Work that reflects the community's values becomes more purposeful, impactful, and rewarding.

Establishing that vision and those values can be an intentional project on its own, or it may be done as part of a planning process. Either way, values inform the community vision and serve as the basis for planning.

In Michigan, zoning must be based upon a master plan. Communities that adopt master plans, in most cases are also required to develop and adopt capital improvement plans. Communities with parks and recreational facilities often adopt recreation plans. Communities with downtown development authorities must adopt downtown development plans. To comply with federal law, municipalities must develop an ADA transition plan, and those that are large enough to receive direct federal aid, must develop consolidated plans. So. Many. Plans.

This section will speak specifically about master planning, capital improvement planning and the importance of plan alignment. But the technical guidance outlined below is helpful as a community or organization develops any type of plan.

Plan Alignment: Master Plan, DDA Plan, CIP, Barrier-Free Plan

For a community to function effectively, its guiding documents cannot exist in isolation. All plans must work together as a cohesive, mutually reinforcing system. An example of plans not working in alignment or contradicting each other could be a DDA plan asserting that more surface parking is needed behind the businesses, while the master plan states that a walkable downtown is a priority with on street parking and housing immediately abutting the businesses. This contradiction could result in misunderstandings and perhaps litigation if a business seeks a rezoning of a residential use to parking and is denied. The business owner sees that his plan is just like the DDA's plan, but the DDA plan is not consistent with the master plan. Consistency across plans is critical.

Plan alignment ensures that alternative visions are resolved prior to an applicant coming before a board. The community's long-term vision is consistently translated into a transparent, defensible, and efficient process for development.

Planning Tools: Master Plan

Figure 6.1: A public participation meeting. A typical master plan establishes goals with public input.

A master plan or comprehensive plan is a long-range policy document that establishes a community's vision for its future physical development and serves as the foundational guide for all land use and development decisions. It translates a community's values, aspirations and goals into a framework for growth and preservation. Master planning provides the legal foundation for zoning. Together they serve as the standards against which new development proposals are reviewed.

The master plan is an excellent opportunity to introduce inclusive principles and establish this as a policy priority.

The typical master plan **identifies and evaluates existing conditions and trends** related to physical development or redevelopment of a community, **establishes goals with public input, and identifies implementation actions.**

Things to know about master plans from the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008) (MPEA)

Its purpose is to guide future development that is "coordinated, adjusted, harmonious, efficient, and economical" and that will "best promote public health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare." (Sec. 7)

Its scope is comprehensive and will include a wide range of topics, such as future land use, transportation systems, housing, recreation, public utilities, and the protection of natural resources. (Sec. 33)

It requires public participation. The process to adopt a master plan must include "reasonable notice" and an "opportunity for the public to submit comments" before the planning commission adopts the plan. (Sec. 43)

Each of these master plan chapters or elements provides opportunities to determine not only how accessible a community is, but how accessible and inclusive it would like to be.

Master plans also serve as the basis for the community's capital improvement plan and the communities zoning ordinance (those are covered in more detail below).

Identify and Evaluate Existing Conditions and Trends

Identifying and analyzing existing conditions helps a community to understand its current state and provides a basis for predictions for the future. The Existing Conditions chapter typically includes **demographics**, natural features, **housing, commercial/industrial, community and public facilities** (recreation, schools, government facilities), utilities, and **transportation (roads, nonmotorized facilities, including sidewalks, and transit).** Specifically naming Inclusive Design as a policy priority puts everyone on notice that inclusive design is a core principle guiding all decisions and outcomes. The principles should be embedded throughout the document. The sections below focus on those elements relevant to inclusive development.

Demographics

Common demographic data collected for the master plan includes age, income, educational attainment, employment, and more. Comparing current data to past trends can determine what changes are occurring and what direction trends are pointing toward. The United States Census

Census data: A tool to look at existing conditions

The United States Census Bureau provides free, reliable, and standardized data for communities, enabling accurate analysis of local trends and the ability to compare your community to nearby locations, the state, or the nation as a whole. For municipal level data, go to https://data.census.gov/

Data Profiles (DP) consolidate the most important data from various subjects into a single, easy to use profile. The four main Data Profiles include:

DP02: Selected Social Characteristics

DP03: Selected Economic Characteristics

DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics

DP05: Demographic and Housing Estimates

Another good data source: MSHDA's MIHousingData portal. Click on Health and Housing to gather high level information about disabilities and chronic health: https://mihousingdata.org/data_portal

Bureau provides free, reliable, and standardized demographic data for communities. Once collected, analysis includes considering changes in population growth, income, race, age, education level, and employment. Important data also is available for disabled residents (see above on where to locate information for your community), which will enable the collection of vital information for this discreet sector of your population, and can include statistics about employment and education, income, and household composition. Community data by the census tract or block group will identify more accurately if disabled or aging residents are concentrated in a particular neighborhood. This will help local decision makers determine where services and amenities should be targeted.

Consider the following:

- Age distribution (If your community's population is aging, programs for aging in place, housing rehabilitation grants, and other accessible housing options will be an important priority.)
- Income levels and poverty rate. Are households relatively well off or getting poorer? (This can help policy makers determine what other supports may be needed).
- Household size. Are households growing or shrinking? (This can help policy makers determine if other support may be needed for aging residents)

- Disabilities: Are the number of residents with disabilities increasing or decreasing over time? (The US. Census Bureau provides data on residents with disabilities, but for a more complete picture, see the sidebar from the Urban Institute below).

As local data is collected, understand that there will be gaps. Other ways to acquire this data include a community survey, listening sessions with community members, or focus groups.

Housing

Housing consumes the majority of the land area in most communities. Conducting a housing inventory during the planning process is essential to understand current conditions, and to predict future housing needs. With a lens on inclusive design, it is important to quantify the number of accessible or barrier free housing units present. Consider the following when conducting your analysis:

- Inventory of the housing types (single-family, duplexes, apartments).
- Identify the number and type of housing units Determine if that number increased or decreased over time.

According to the Urban Institute: Including Disability Data Can Be Challenging

The American Community Survey and the Community Population Survey both have historically provided data on several metrics that can be disaggregated by disability status and remain the foundational standard for national disability data. However, measuring disability status is complex, and most scales use a functional definition of disability—how the disability limits activities of daily living—which underestimates some portion of the disabled community. Existing data are often limited in how disability is defined and who is captured by that definition. There's a wide range of disabilities, and there isn't a universally accepted definition for "disability." The current national question sets have been shown to perform particularly poorly in capturing neurological disabilities, developmental disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, and chronic illnesses.

Identifying and collecting data related to disability. Local leaders focused on upward mobility in their communities can bridge this data gap through creative solutions to identify, access, and collect data that includes information about people with disabilities. This may be through existing, publicly available federal, state, or local data sources or through collaboration with community organizations, such as service providers, to help with original data collection efforts.

- Inventory group living arrangements in your community.
- Determine the cost of housing. Understand gross rent as a percentage of household income; this data will let you know what percentage of household income individual renters and homeowners pay for personal housing costs. In particular, consider the proportion of renters that are cost-burdened – i.e., Spending more than 30% of household income on housing expenses. If that rate is increasing over time, likely residents are especially vulnerable to downturns in the economy and additional support may be necessary to keep them housed.
- For detached dwellings, determine how many are single story. While not all single-story homes are accessible, a single-story house is easier to make accessible than a split level or a two-story house.
- Inventory which multi-family or apartment complexes have elevators.
- Is the demand for barrier free housing greater than supply; and if yes, by how much?
- Where is most of the barrier free housing located? Is it connected to the community with accessible transportation?
- Would residents be better served if additional inclusive housing were located in other neighborhoods?

Sources of Data:

The U.S. Census data is an excellent source for housing data but supplementing that information with other resources is valuable.

- Building permit history is an excellent way to discover the composition of housing in your community.
- Social service agencies locally and regionally will have a list of existing group homes and have a handle on inventory, service gaps, and if there are waiting lists.
- Assessor's Record can provide detailed information, including sophisticated GIS analysis of where investment has been happening, and other targeted information.
- A windshield survey - the systematic observation of buildings and uses in a community typically conducted while driving - is another way to assess general neighborhood conditions and can help understand specific community issues.

Commercial / Industrial

This element of the master plan examines the economic health of the community. It typically includes an inventory of the types and locations of businesses, from downtown retail shops and commercial corridors to industrial parks, and analyzes key data like commercial vacancy rates and market trends.

Not everyone who works in a community also lives there. Economic regions are not always clearly defined and do not stop at municipal boundaries. A community is part of a larger economic system where goods and services flow across jurisdictions.

With a lens toward accessibility and inclusivity, review your community's commercial and industrial areas–your employment centers. Are they accessible by public transportation, and once you arrive easy to get to? How would someone who couldn't drive get to those areas? How would a potential customer know if the business is accessible before making the trip?

If your community has a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) or a Business Improvement District (BID), review the plans to see what the priorities are.

Community and Public Facilities

Community facilities (schools, recreational facilities including parks, and other public buildings like the library, city hall or the water treatment plant) are owned, operated and activated by the government so they are subject to ADA. New facilities should be properly designed to ensure everyone, regardless of their abilities, can access, use and enjoy these facilities. Recreational facilities are often operated by units of government, and are subject to the ADA. Review the ADA transition plan for these public spaces and places to determine what changes are still needed to be compliant.

Transportation

Collecting and analyzing transportation data includes assessing not only the facilities themselves (the roads, sidewalks, and bike paths), but also how (and how well) people use those facilities (modes of transportation, transit, commuting data).

The U.S. Census has data regarding commutes and vehicle ownership. The U.S. Census will have the following data, and as with other systems, it is better to look at whether these numbers are trending up or trending down.

Connecting with your regional planning organization

Your county or regional planning organization can be a great resource for examining existing conditions. They can provide technical assistance and data, such as existing land use maps, that can be invaluable for your local planning efforts.

Michigan has 14 separate regional planning associations that offer a variety of services.

Commuting data: How easy or hard a commute is impacts quality of life.

For residents who work, the commuting times tells whether they can find jobs where they live, or if they are working in another community.

If the commutes seem much too long, what can local decision makers do to get the housing, schools, and jobs closer to each other.

Mode of transportation to work: This data will tell you how many people drive, take transit, rideshare, or carpool.

Paired with information on the length of the commute, planners can draw conclusions on how well modes other than driving are functioning.

If the data is available at the census tract or block group level, disparities regarding access to transit may become apparent. What can local decision makers do to solve this problem?

Households with no vehicle access: There's additional data that reveals how many cars a household has.

Check the number that has no vehicle access and see how that number has changed over time. If it has increased and your community does not have a robust transit system, then getting to work and shopping are going to be challenging for your residents.

Streets, roads, sidewalks, and bike paths take up an enormous amount of land in a community and are typically publicly owned and maintained. As these improvements are often operated by units of government, they are subject to the ADA. Review the ADA transition plans for these units of government to determine what changes are still needed.

If the community has transit, the transit agency can provide information about transit routes and ridership data. Past data can reveal possible future trends. In addition to transit route changes

Housing + Transportation Affordability Index

The Housing + Transportation Affordability Index provides a comprehensive view of affordability that includes both the cost of housing and the cost of transportation at the neighborhood level. The mapping software (available for free online) provides data demonstrating that while housing may be affordable, the cost of the commute may raise the price of that neighborhood beyond what is actually affordable.

and ridership numbers, look for data on the stops or stations. Does the transit agency have a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) that identifies where needed improvements are proposed, and are they laid out in a schedule? Review that against "real time" conditions–are the stops or stations accessible? Whose responsibility is the stop or station? For example, if it is at a transit agency hub, it is the agency's responsibility. But if the stop is along the shoulder of the road, or on an easement between the sidewalk and the street, it is in the public right of way and considered an element of that road or street, so coordination between MDOT, the county road commission, or the municipality is necessary. If the stop or station is accessible, is the route from the abutting neighborhood accessible?

Finally, a live walking audit with a wide variety of users will reveal just how accessible the sidewalks, crossings, and transit stops actually are. The results of the audit should inform not only the master plan, but the ADA transition plan, the Capital Improvement Plan (see section below), and possibly the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) plan.

Downtown streetscapes, sidewalks, plazas, trails, and gateways should be designed for everyone to use: pedestrians of all ages and abilities, including children, older adults, and people living with disabilities. Inclusive design of public spaces includes constructing physical accessibility features (ramps and elevators), sensor friendly elements (clear signage, quiet zones), culturally relevant art and programming, and flexible furniture that is welcoming to all and which fosters social inclusion and a sense of belonging.

Establish Goals with Public Input

Creating meaningful master plan goals is fundamental to the success of the planning process. Meaningful goals emerge from a community engagement process that is inclusive, interactive, and iterative. The goals should connect an aspirational vision with specific actions. Public input occurs throughout the planning process and informs a community's shared vision, goals and strategies (see Chapter 9 of the Toolkit for strategies on making the engagement inclusive).

A typical master plan includes overall goals and objectives for housing, economic development, transportation, infrastructure and public spaces, community identity, natural areas and environmental preservation, among others. Each of these plan elements provides an opportunity to integrate community aspirations about inclusive design and accessibility.

For example, if a master plan:

- Has visions or values that include "caring and welcoming to people of all ages and abilities" then increasing the number of accessible housing units and ensuring accessible transportation could be included as a goal or objective.

The Roles of Plans

Master Plan: Establishes the broad, long-range vision for the community's future. Community decisions should be checked against a simple question: "Does this action help us achieve the vision determined in our master plan?"

Downtown Development Authority (DDA) Plan: Details specific projects, programs, and strategies to improve the economic and physical health of the DDA district.

ADA Transition Plan (sometimes called a Barrier Free Plan): Guides public entities toward compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. It identifies architectural barriers that prevent individuals with disabilities from accessing a local government's programs, services, and activities. The plan must detail the methods used to remove these obstacles, establish a schedule for completion, and name the official responsible for its implementation.

Under federal law, all state and local government organizations with 50 or more employees are required to develop a Transition Plan if structural modifications are needed to achieve program accessibility. This requirement ensures larger public entities systematically address deficiencies to provide equal access to their facilities and services. While smaller government entities are still subject to Title II's non-discrimination requirements, they are not formally mandated to maintain an ADA Transition Plan.

CIP: Prioritizes and schedules the actual implementation of projects. A properly planned CIP will include projects that trace directly back to the goals of the master plan, along with needs identified in other plans like the DDA plan and barrier-free plan.

- Has a goal to develop a transportation system that is accessible, seamless, and inclusive for all members of the community, regardless of age, ability, or socio-economic status, then it should provide a specific implementation strategy to make the system accessible for all.
- Has a goal to ensure safe accessible housing for everyone, then it should include zoning strategies that encourage a range of accessible housing close to services and shopping.
- Prioritizes "mixed-use buildings, homes, offices, entertainment, retail, restaurants, and institutions", then requiring that the residential units be accessible should also be a goal.

Other Goals or Objectives to consider:

- The community should have a variety of housing types that are accessible, enabling residents to age in place and continue to live in the community for their entire lives.
- Provide education, financial incentives, streamlined review processes, and flexible mechanisms for housing developers to construct accessible housing units.
- If your community already supports Complete Streets principles, consider Complete Housing or Complete Recreation principles, and frame them similarly.

Identify Implementation Actions

As a community determines the shared vision and long-term goals, the methods for making those goals a reality will vary depending on its capacity, available partners, determination, and resources. For instance, if a community expresses the goal of providing missing middle housing close to its downtown area, implementation strategies may include any or all of the following (depending upon capacity and resources available):

1. Update zoning to allow duplexes and triplexes and small apartment buildings.
2. Update zoning to allow staff to issue permits for duplexes and triplexes (administrative approvals) removing development review and public hearings.
3. Develop pre-approved plans for contextual missing middle housing.
4. Host a workshop for small-scale developers who may wish to build housing.

A Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a multi-year planning tool that outlines a community's funding and schedule for significant, long-term capital expenditures. In a bigger picture, it shapes a municipality's future. It translates long-term visions of a community into tangible, physical projects.

With a newly adopted master plan that integrates inclusive design principles throughout, a capital improvements plan that implements the master plan capital recommendations is also needed.

Since CIP includes public facilities and infrastructure, it is already subject to ADA compliance. However, it is important to note that the ADA is the minimum required. Develop a capital improvement plan that supports inclusive design in your community by reaching out to community members during the design phase, remembering that inclusive design is not always more costly and early adjustments to the design can make all the difference in public infrastructure.

Complete Streets and Transportation Oriented Design (TOD)

Approaches such as Complete Streets and transit-oriented design (TOD) help translate inclusive transportation principles into practice. Streets designed with inclusivity in mind should be not only functional, but also inviting to people of all ages and abilities. Regular reassessment of design and operations ensures continued alignment with community needs and interests.

Complete Streets

An approach to transportation that calls for the planning, design, construction, maintenance and operation of streets, roads, highways, and other transportation facilities to:

- Serve multiple modes, including walking and biking
- Meet the needs of all users, including all ages and abilities
- Provide equitable and safe access and mobility

Standard design considerations for Complete Streets:

- Wide sidewalks/pathways for nonmotorized modes of transportation (pedestrians, bicyclists, scooters, etc.)
- Defined/delineated spaces with paving materials of different colors and textures
- Space for transit, carpooling, pick up/drop off
- Areas for socializing
- Seating
- Lighting
- Landscaping

Transit Oriented Design (TOD)

An approach to development that creates compact, walkable, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use communities centered around high-quality transit systems. This development approach improves efficiencies, reduces vehicle dependency, and revitalizes underutilized corridors and areas within a region. It also aims to increase access to goods and services by reducing geographical separation and allows residents to live, work, and play in the same area with land use diversity and connectivity.

Planning Tools: Capital Improvement Plan

Figure 7.1: Traffic signals and signs. Infrastructure costs are important to include in a Capital Improvement Plan.

A Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a multi-year planning tool that outlines a community's funding and schedule for significant, long-term capital expenditures. In a bigger picture, it shapes a municipality's future. It translates long-term visions of a community into tangible, physical projects. With a newly adopted master plan that integrates inclusive design principles throughout, a capital improvements plan that implements the master plan capital recommendations is also needed.

Redevelopment Ready Communities: Capital Improvements Plan Guide

To learn more about CIPs and using them as powerful economic development and planning tool, refer to Michigan Economic Development Corporation's (MEDC) Redevelopment Ready Communities: Capital Improvements Plan Guide. It provides practical steps for creating a transparent and predictable process that aligns with community goals.

Since CIP includes public facilities and infrastructure, it is already subject to ADA compliance. However, it is important to note that the ADA is the minimum required. Develop a capital improvement plan that supports inclusive design in your community by reaching out to community members during the design phase, remembering that inclusive design is not always more costly and early adjustments to the design can make all the difference in public infrastructure.

Things to know about the CIP from Section 65 of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008)

For communities with a master plan, adopting a CIP annually is mandatory: The planning commission "shall annually prepare a capital improvements plan."

It must follow the master plan: The CIP must be prepared "after adoption of a master plan" and its purpose is to "further the desirable future development of the local unit of government under the master plan."

It has a specific timeframe: The CIP covers "the ensuing 6-year period."

It balances vision with reality: The act requires that the capital improvements are "desirable" and something that a community can "reasonably be expected to finance."

Note: The MPEA uses the term "Capital Improvements Program."

Zoning

Zoning is the public regulation of the use land, and it also regulates area, height, and placement of structure on the land. Zoning establishes the processes required to obtain changes to land use and outlines the standards that must be met for those changes to be made. Zoning is a police power, which authorizes government to regulate the use of private property. It is one of many such laws, including building and health codes, designed to protect the public health, safety and general welfare of a community.

In Michigan, zoning - and a municipality's power to zone - comes from Michigan Zoning Enabling Act.

The act highlights several purposes of zoning and describes legitimate governmental interests in the regulation of land use, including:

- Protecting property values
- Implementing the master plan
- Protecting natural resources
- Preventing nuisances
- Ensuring compatibility of uses
- Preventing overcrowding
- Preventing the overuse of land, and
- Promoting health, safety and welfare.

However, in its attempt to protect and promote beneficial ideals, it has also created barriers to developing communities that are truly accessible to everyone. Below are common zoning regulations that may hinder accessibility, along with interventions to help your community become a more inclusive place.

Zoning Definitions: Family

Figure 9.1: Escher co-op in Ann Arbor, Michigan. A type of housing arrangement that can be affected by the ordinance definition of a family (photo by Steve Jensen).

What is a family? Historically, for zoning purposes, the definition of family has been restrictive, limiting a household to a group of people related by blood, marriage, or adoption with a strict cap on unrelated individuals to control density or prevent certain types of group housing. Like zoning codes that prioritize single – family development over a variety of other housing types, family definitions can perpetuate exclusive practices, making it difficult or impossible for protected classes of people, or vulnerable populations, to access a range of housing options. Once a stable housing option for lower income and single adults, along with disabled individuals, Single Room Occupancy (SRO's), or rooming houses, are another example of an affordable and sometimes transitional housing model that have been zoned out.

Evaluating zoning regulations for barriers like those above, and updating them with more contemporary and inclusive features, can go a long way towards expanding housing options for the disabled; lower income; and seniors looking for alternative housing options. Normalizing a more inclusive definition of "family" could be transformative.

Many zoning codes commonly define the term "family" in restrictive ways, which is challenging for non-nuclear families and households who may operate as a family but are unrelated. Often these restrictive codes were established because of perceptions that a group of unrelated people will not maintain the property and the quiet peacefulness of the neighborhood, or that group homes for people with disabilities, or those previously incarcerated, or in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction could overwhelm a neighborhood by allowing "undesirable" populations. But each of these examples is intended to create a "family like" environment, creating family benefits in nontraditional household formations. But there are other ways to enforce property maintenance and noise, not pre-emptively through zoning.

Trying to enforce the family definition is fraught with privacy, bias, and discrimination issues. Who looks like a family? How do we decide? If there was a complaint, who brought forward the allegation and why?

In the 1974 case Village of Belle Terre v. Boraas, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that municipalities can legally differentiate between related and unrelated families.

In the Dinolfo case, the Michigan Supreme Court failed to see how an ordinance which limited the number of unrelated people who may occupy a residential dwelling furthers the goal of keeping a neighborhood quiet. Furthermore, unrelated people were artificially limited to two, while related families may expand without limit. The ordinance indiscriminately regulated when no regulation was needed and failed to regulate where regulation was most needed.

How can this help or hurt inclusivity?

The Fair Housing Act protects people with disabilities from local zoning regulations that restrict unrelated people from living together. A municipality must be prepared to grant reasonable accommodations if their codes restrict these living arrangements (see the Variances chapter for more information).

However, an accommodation is a "regulatory hoop to jump through." A municipality should be prepared to argue why a household of unrelated people, regardless of disabilities, who are functioning as a family is different than a stereotypical family from the 1960s. Concerns about nuisances like noise, parking, overcrowding, and property maintenance should be regulated and enforced on their own, and not bundled preeminently with zoning.

Shared living space and shared economic security are the two biggest reasons that people may decide to live with roommates. Housing that is no longer easily affordable or available has resulted in grown children living with their parents, unable to move out. Groups of unrelated roommates well out of college and employed, continue to cohabitate in order to make rent. An older homeowner may want to rent out a room to a tenant or boarder.

Living with shared common space, whether in large single-family homes or larger cohousing communities, provides a sense of connection that many people are seeking in their lives.

Owning real estate cooperatively can be a good investment for individuals or provide for long-term affordability, depending on the ownership structure (see sidebar on Co-Op Housing).

Summary of Delta Charter Twp. v. Dinolfo

Zoning rules based on biological or legal relationships are flawed because they often exclude harmless living arrangements while allowing others that undermine neighborhood stability. For example, such laws might bar unrelated individuals from living together, yet permit large groups of distant relatives—an arbitrary distinction with little rational connection to the intended goal.

While in Town of Durham v. White Enterprises, the courts upheld such a distinction, claiming the state has an interest in preserving biological or legal families, later decisions rejected that reasoning. In Hopkins v. Zoning Hearing Board of Abington Township, the court found no valid or rational basis for excluding unrelated individuals—such as people with disabilities—from shared living arrangements, as doing so does not actually serve the goal of preserving neighborhood character.

In Delta Charter Twp v. Dinolfo, the court added: "We know from common experience that, while the motorcycle gang argument is a threatening one, it is more a symbol, one that is not by any stretch of the imagination representative of the lifestyle of the countless people who seek residential living in something other than the biological family setting. As to the specter of a "Work of Satan" group that could slip in if defendants succeed here, we note that if this ordinance were upheld it would not keep out Ma Barker and her sons."

What can you do?

Appointed or Elected Officials: Review your zoning ordinance to determine if family is defined. If it is, advocate for an ordinance change so it complies with Michigan case law. If there are concerns about nuisances of big group houses — parties, parking, trash — then manage those directly. Pass stronger laws and fund enforcement of garbage and noise violations and illegal parking.

Planners: Review the zoning ordinance and determine if the family is defined. If it is, update the ordinance to comply with Michigan case law. Work with other departments to manage other issues such as noise, parking, and property maintenance.

Community Development Professionals: Review your communities' zoning ordinances. If the term "family" is defined, advocate for the most liberal definition of family. Familiarize yourself with examples of other ordinances that can mitigate nuisances that the definition might be trying to manage, such as noise or parking.

How addressing the definition of a family aligns with MSHDA's Statewide Housing Plan:

Goal 1: Longstanding disparities in housing have compromised individual and family access to housing and generational wealth-building. To achieve the vision, housing opportunities must be equitable.

Strategy 1.3.B: Incentivize more affordable 3- and 4-bedroom unit options for larger and multigenerational households.

Goal 5: Housing for older adults is of special concern in Michigan due to the growth of its aging population.

Michigan's Statewide Housing Plan

Cooperative Housing: A Model for Affordability and Belonging

A housing cooperative (co-op) is a legal entity that owns residential property—often organized as a cooperative or corporation—where residents are shareholders or members rather than individual property owners. Members purchase a share in the co-op, granting them the right to occupy a unit and participate in the community's governance. A Board of Directors, elected by members, manages operations and sets community standards. Members typically make monthly payments covering maintenance, utilities, and taxes.

Co-ops can take the form of apartments, townhouses, or detached homes, and often feature shared amenities and activities that foster a sense of community. Because the cooperative holds the property title and handles all maintenance and repairs, members avoid the costs and responsibilities typical of homeowners. Unlike for-profit landlords, co-ops operate at cost, making housing more affordable and accessible.

This cooperative model also supports social well-being. The U.S. Surgeon General's 2023 Advisory on Loneliness and Isolation emphasized that strong social connections are vital to both individual and community health. It identified strengthening social infrastructure—such as cooperative living environments—as a key strategy to combat loneliness, particularly for individuals facing health challenges, disabilities, financial insecurity, or social isolation.

Examples in Michigan or elsewhere

- Charter Oaks Cooperative, Clinton Township, Michigan
- Inter-Cooperative Council, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- Queen City Cooperative, Denver, Colorado
- Our Urban Village, Vancouver, Canada
- The Kelsey, San Francisco, California

Zoning Definitions: Group Homes and State Licensed Residential Facilities

Figures 10.1: Various types of group living facilities.

Often, a community's zoning ordinance defines different types of group or congregate living situations. See the side bar on page 53 for the various words we use to describe group living. Some group living is more structured with staff on the premises, such as a nursing home or a homeless shelter. Others are not staffed, like a fraternity house or a convent. The term "group home" can refer to any congregate housing arrangement for a group of unrelated people. Residents often share a condition, characteristic, or status not typical of the general population.

Some housing in Michigan is state licensed. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEA) governs how state licensed residential facilities are treated for zoning purposes, requiring they be treated as permitted residential uses. The definitions for the specific facility types, come from the Adult Foster Care Facility Licensing Act (Act 218 of 1979) and 1973 PA 116:

- Adult foster care family home: a private residence with the approved capacity to receive six or fewer adults to be provided with foster care for 5 or more days a week and for two or more consecutive weeks. The adult foster care family home licensee shall be a member of the household, and an occupant of the residence.
- Adult foster care small group home: an adult foster care facility with the approved capacity to receive 12 or fewer adults to be provided with foster care.
- Adult foster care large group home: an adult foster care facility with the approved capacity to receive at least 13 but not more than 20 adults to be provided with foster care.

The MZEA defines a "state licensed residential facility" as a structure constructed for residential purposes, licensed by the state, that provides residential services for 6 or fewer individuals under 24-hour supervision or care. Adult foster care facilities (small and large group homes) are separately addressed under the MZEA and are also protected as residential uses of property for zoning purposes.

State law prohibits municipalities from subjecting adult foster care or state licensed residential facilities to a permit or procedure different than what is required for a dwelling of similar density. A large group home may only be classified as a special land use if that same special use process applies equally to other dwellings of similar density in that zone. State licensed residential facilities can be an apartment or townhouse, or a single-family home.

Not all households that appear to be a "residential facility" are state licensed, nor are they required to be. Sometimes individuals share a home or apartment with other people to share costs (see chapter on Definition of a Family).

There are many types of group living arrangements for individuals who qualify as having disabilities under the Fair Housing Act (FHA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and corresponding state fair housing laws. While many of these arrangements are not subject to licensing requirements, they are nonetheless entitled—under federal and state law—to the same treatment and protections afforded to housing for individuals without disabilities.

In some cases, a group of people will live together and receive Supported Independence Program services (SIP). Through SIP, people who are living independently can still receive the level of supports and services they need. Many people choose to receive services through the Self-Determination Initiative (SDI), which encourages individuals to design and direct their own supports.

How can this help or hurt inclusivity?

Michigan law is clear that households of similar size, regardless of the composition of the household, must be treated similarly by the zoning ordinance. See Definition of Family Chapter for more information.

The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act requires that state licensed residential facilities be treated as a residential use of property for the purposes of zoning, and as a permitted use in all residential zones.

Noncompliance with state law regarding residential facility definitions and regulations is discriminatory and places additional barriers on people trying to find a place to live.

A municipality should be consistent with its definitions and regulations of group homes, regardless of whether or not the home is state licensed.

The Fair Housing Act protects people with disabilities from local zoning regulations that restrict unrelated people from living together. A municipality must be prepared to grant reasonable accommodations if their codes restrict these living arrangements (see chapter on Variances).

However, an accommodation is a "regulatory hoop to jump through." Given the wide variety of group or congregate living homes a community may need to include, thoughtful planning as well as zoning and other regulations are needed. Not all types of group housing are federally protected. A municipality should proactively determine and define group housing types so that residents and developers know the regulations and procedures.

So Many Types of Congregate or Group Living:

- Assisted Living Facilities
- Boarding Houses
- College Dormitories
- Community Care Homes
- Community Residential Facilities
- Convents
- Domestic Violence Shelters
- Fraternity and Sorority Houses
- Group Living Facilities
- Halfway Houses
- Homeless Shelters
- Monasteries
- Nursing Homes
- Rooming Houses
- Temporary Worker Housing

What can you do?

Officials/Planners : Check for inconsistencies with equivalent residential uses of similar density. For example, are AFC family care homes subject to the same procedures as single-family homes in the same district or are there extra requirements?

If an AFC large group home (13-20 adults) is classified as a special land use within a certain zoning district, is the procedure no different than for other dwellings of similar density in the same zone? Are there potentially discriminatory standards for approval, such as the required 1,000-foot separation between AFC homes?

Community Development Professionals : Review local ordinances for the communities you work in. Advocate for changes to provide additional housing opportunities.

How addressing the definition of group homes and state residential facilities aligns with MSHDA's Statewide Housing Plan:

Goal 1: Longstanding disparities in housing have compromised individual and family access to housing and generational wealth-building. To achieve the vision, housing opportunities must be equitable.

Strategy 1.3.B: Incentivize more affordable 3- and 4-bedroom unit options for larger and multigenerational households.

Goal 5: Housing for older adults is of special concern in Michigan due to the growth of its aging population.

Michigan's Statewide Housing Plan

Zoning Tools: Encroachments into Setbacks

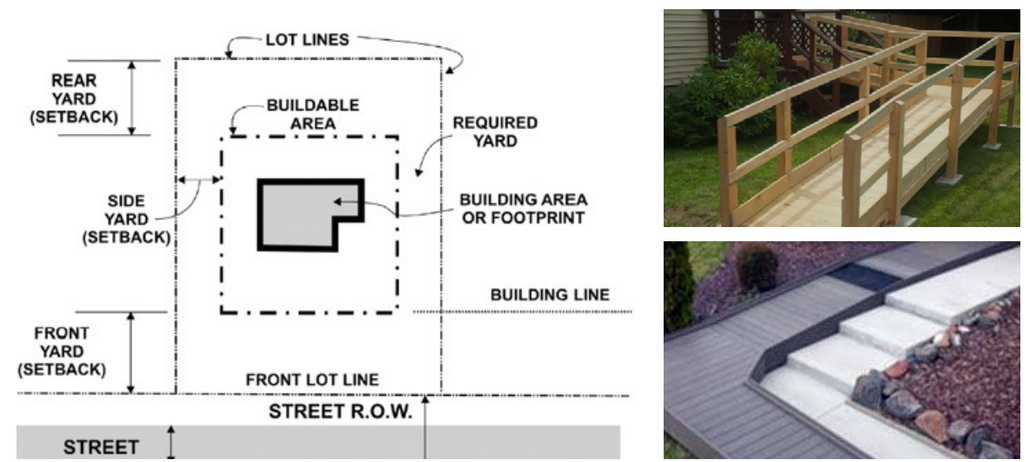

Figure 11.1: Diagram of setbacks and pictures of ramps that connect to homes.

Zoning ordinances define a setback as that portion of the yard that must be kept clear of any structure or building. Usually, there are front, rear, and side yard setbacks. See illustration above.

Often the zoning ordinance will stipulate what types of encroachments are permitted within this required setback area; for instance, balconies, decks, porches, gutters, or overhangs. Typically, the plans for houses, porches or decks simply require review by a building official or inspector.

While the zoning ordinances address decks or porches, they are often silent on how to access the deck or porch and whether that method (stairs or a ramp) can encroach further into the setback or yard or must be included within that setback. This leaves the issue of stairs or ramps subject to interpretation by the building official/inspector.

How can this help or hurt inclusivity?

If the codes are silent on the means to access the porch or deck, any of the following may happen:

- The stairs will be allowed to encroach further into the yard/setback
- Stairs will need to be included in the encroachment, resulting in a narrow deck or porch
- A ramp will be permitted to encroach further into the yard/setback
- A variance request for the ramp will be sent to the zoning board of appeals

What can you do?

Appointed or Elected Officials: Ask the planning/building department staff to provide a report explaining how ramps and steps are handled in the community. Advocate for changes to make it more inclusive and clearer.

Planners/Building Officials: Determine the ordinance and variance process (if any) for ramps and stairs. Update the ordinance and process to make accessible design and retrofits easier in the community.

Community Development Professionals: Request that the community provide directions on how ramps and steps are handled by the local building department. Advocate for changes to make it more inclusive and clearer.

Example in Michigan or Elsewhere

City of Ypsilanti

Barrier-free access ramps

Barrier-free access ramps may be located within any front, side or rear yard, provided that no portion of the ramp which exceeds over 36 inches in height is located within any required minimum yard setback area. This provision may be waived by the Building Department for a temporary barrier free access ramp to a single-or two-family dwelling, provided that the Building Department finds that such proposed barrier-free ramp will not pose a fire or safety hazard, and will not obstruct traffic vision. A temporary barrier-free access ramp must be removed within 14 days after the person needing the ramp ceases to occupy a dwelling. (Section 122-654), page 200

How addressing encroachments into setbacks aligns with MSHDA's Statewide Housing Plan:

Strategy 5.1.A: Review and modify housing programs to remove barriers to expanding and improving older adult housing.

Michigan's Statewide Housing Plan

City of Flint

Wheelchair Ramps

The Zoning Coordinator may permit wheelchair ramps used for persons with mobility impairments in any yard, provided the location shall not create a hazard or otherwise impede access for operations related to safety, such as access for fire personnel or equipment. (Section 50-57 Lot and Yard Measurements).

Primary Entrance. An Administrative Waiver may be granted by the Zoning Coordinator for handicap ramps and other modifications to a dwelling's primary entrance for housing intended to accommodate persons with mobility impairments. (Section 50-59 Single-Family Dwellings, Detached) page 11

City of Grand Rapids

Wheelchair Ramps

a. The Director may permit wheelchair ramps used for persons with mobility impairments in a front or rear yard, provided the location does not create a hazard, or impede access for operations related to safety, such as access for fire personnel or equipment. In no case shall a ramp be placed nearer than three (3) feet from any side lot line.

b. Administrative Departure. An Administrative Departure may be approved to permit a ramp, or any additional modifications needed, nearer than three (3) feet to the side lot line, where it is demonstrated that no other feasible location is practical (Article 2 General Provisions), page 2.6

International Zoning Code

804.2 Front yards.

Open, unenclosed ramps, porches, platforms or landings not covered by a roof, shall be permitted to extend not more than 6 feet into the required front yard, provided that such porch does not extend above the first level and is not more than 6 feet above grade at any point.

Zoning Tools: Higher Density Development

Figure 12.1: Pictures of communities with high density.

Higher density development minimizes urban sprawl, preserves natural landscapes, and protects agricultural land by concentrating development within defined areas. It allows existing infrastructure to be used to its fullest potential, rather than extending costly pipes and roads. It enables public transit to operate more efficiently. Done well, it also creates places for community gathering whether in a public square or park.

The term “density” has been the subject of considerable discussion in urban design circles. Some lament that “density” doesn’t capture, in a positive way, what planners, architects and designers are aiming for. Some have said “neighborhood compactness” is a better term.

The photograph below illustrates all of the good attributes of denser development – amenities close by, smaller (maybe more affordable) residences, sidewalks and streets that include all modes of transportation.

Figure 12.2: Rendering of a community with high density.

How can this help or hurt inclusivity?

Density does all of these good things, but it also provides residents who don't drive easier access to services, shopping, and work. Denser development makes public transit more possible, but denser development makes the need to use a vehicle to get to the store or work or an appointment less necessary.

Denser development, done well, is also very desirable and therefore expensive. Walkable places like Ann Arbor, Royal Oak, Traverse City and Marquette are more expensive places to buy or rent a house or apartment.

Creating more places—neighborhood nodes, village centers—will take time. But it is necessary if we want to create places where everyone can grow old and stay in their community. The next three toolkit strategies all tackle density.

Zoning Tools: Missing Middle Housing and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's)

Figure 13.1: Missing middle housing types.

Missing middle housing types take many shapes and forms, including residences that fall between detached single-family homes and larger multi-family housing. Common configurations include du-, tri-, and quadplexes, townhomes, cottage courts, and smaller apartment buildings. Accessory dwelling Units (ADU's) are often classified as missing middle housing. The Opticos graphic on the next page illustrates these housing types.

An ADU is a small residence that shares a lot or building footprint with a larger primary dwelling. ADU's can offer tremendous flexibility for the homeowner – a place for an aging parent who would like to remain semi-independent but needs someone to look in on them regularly; an adult child saving for the down-payment to purchase their own home; a family friend who has recently gone through a

divorce; or a working professional who has relocated to the area for a job but would like to take time to get to know the community before buying a home. Sometimes the homeowner will live in the accessory dwelling and rent the primary home to a family. ADUs come in various configurations:

- A freestanding little house in the back yard is potentially accessible, but is expensive to construct primarily because typically separate utility lines need to be run to the second structure.
- An ADU above a detached garage is more affordable to build, but not accessible for a person with mobility challenges.
- ADUs can also be "carved out" of existing single family homes. Because the utilities and exterior structure are already present, this is the most affordable option. Depending upon on the design of the existing dwelling, the "carve out" option can also be an accessible option.

Townhomes or attached single-family homes are typically houses attached to the neighboring house via a shared or common wall. These house types can be built on smaller lots with a smaller building footprint while still allowing for single-family homeownership with a traditional mortgage. The challenge with accessibility is that many townhomes are 2-3 stories tall often with the garage on the first floor and bedrooms on the top floor.

Figure 13.2: Missing middle graphic by Opticos.

Small Apartment House or Mansion House is an excellent way to integrate a different housing type into a neighborhood while maintaining visual and spatial consistency with existing homes. These building types can fit seamlessly onto lots that are very similar in size to a detached house, but can accommodate 3-6 apartment units. These building types create housing choices within neighborhoods that might otherwise be inaccessible to local residents, offering stable housing for essential workers, young professionals, and older residents who would like to age-in-place and no longer want the upkeep of their bigger home. They can also be designed to include accessible, ground level units making them a good option for inclusive design.

How addressing missing middle housing and ADU's align with RRC Best Practices and MSHDA's Statewide Housing Plan:

RRC Best Practices:

2.4 Housing Diversity: Having an ordinance which clearly allows for diverse housing types creates unique neighborhoods, provides lifestyle options for residents of all ages and income levels, helps attract talent, and provides flexibility for meeting market demand.

MSHDA's Statewide Housing Plan:

Goal 4.1: Increase the supply of the full spectrum of housing that is affordable and attainable to Michigan residents.

redevelopment ready communities BEST PRACTICES

Michigan's Statewide Housing Plan

How can this help or hurt inclusivity?

Missing middle housing is generally built at greater densities making it easier to connect with transportation, employment, and shopping. The housing units are typically smaller and therefore the cost of construction per unit is less, making it more affordable and therefore more accessible to more people. They are typically located between an established single family residential neighborhood and a commercial area like a downtown or a commercial corridor making them especially conducive as a medium density buffer zone.

But missing middle type housing may not be accessible to everyone (for example, a 3 story townhouse), so thoughtful planning and regulation is necessary. It's also important to know that some missing middle housing types are constructed under the Michigan Residential Code (townhouses, duplexes, and ADUs), while other types are constructed under the Michigan Construction Code (any development with more than 3 units attached).

The Americans with Disabilities Act and the Fair Housing Act do not require adaptable or readily adaptable (what many people would consider accessible) units, until there are four or more units under a single roof and the requirements never apply to those units that have their own exterior front door (see Chapter on Construction Codes).

Under these overlapping laws, a community could desire townhouses built with universal design principles, affirm this in the master plan and the zoning ordinance, and still not be able to require them because of the building codes.

What can you do?

Appointed/Elected Officials and Planners: Review your master plan and zoning ordinance to determine if missing middle type housing types (ADUs, townhouses, duplexes/triplexes/quads, small apartment buildings) are explicitly identified in the plan as part of the community housing goals and are permitted in the zoning ordinance. Most communities value residents being able to age in place, and providing housing options for all abilities and incomes, and allowing missing middle housing types is a way to more intentionally enable that.

If your zoning ordinance permits missing middle housing, also require that developers/applicants identify on the site plan how many proposed housing units are accessible or accessible-ready. Initiate conversations with the public, builders and developers about the need for more accessible housing. Developers will often provide more than the code requires if they know their customers value it (e.g. double sinks in the master bathroom).

Officials and planners are responsible for informing and educating a wide range of stakeholders about the need for housing that is accessible, showing examples that meet community needs AND look good (not institutional looking), and which demonstrate that building that housing is not much more expensive.

Community Development Professionals: Determine what types of housing are permitted in your community and advocate for a wider variety, if it is needed. Talk with developers about building a variety of housing types. Understand the myriad funding opportunities for housing and help developers make connections to a range of alternatives so more affordable and accessible housing can be built.

Building Officials: Remember that the ADA is the minimum requirement, not the maximum. Advocate for developers and builders to include accessible and accessible ready units. Develop one page information sheets about how building missing middle housing and making it readily adaptable (accessible) does not increase the cost of construction very much, and provides great value to the housing product and the community. Consider waiving or reducing development review fees for builders and developers that advance community goals.

Developers: Talk to planners and officials about why developers aren't building townhouses or duplexes or other missing middle housing types. Reach out to community developers about grants and other funding available to build more affordable housing. Remember that the ADA is the minimum requirement, not the maximum and that designing and constructing accessible-ready units provides future flexibility and will not cost more to build.

Example in Michigan or Elsewhere

City of Brighton

Article 98-3.0 Zoning Districts, R-5 Uptown Multiple Family

The R-5 multiple-family residential medium-to-high density district is intended to provide for residential units in a variety of styles and types within walking distance (five– to ten-minute walk) of downtown and adjacent to the downtown business district. The R-5 district is a unique area of the city. It is located north of downtown, east and west of N. Second Street, and is primarily surrounded by industrial and commercial uses. A portion of the district fronts on the Millpond. It is intended to be transitional between areas of dissimilar land use and the downtown. It also is intended to implement the High Density Mixed Residential category on the City's Future Land Use Map.

This district is divided into two sub-districts: Uptown North and Uptown South. Uptown North is envisioned with larger-scale multiple-family development projects on larger lots. Typical building types include large apartment buildings and townhouses. Uptown South is envisioned with small-scale, multiple-family structures on smaller lots, including redeveloping one or two lots of record that meet the dimensional requirements for the desired building type. Typical building types include townhouses, courtyard apartments, fourplexes, and similar types.

City of Kalamazoo

RD19 Residential, Duplex

The primary purpose of the RD districts is to accommodate the development of two-family dwellings (duplexes or attached houses) and single dwelling units on individual lots.

Occupancy Limits in RD Districts. An owner-occupied dwelling unit in any RD district may be occupied by a family, or a maximum of four unrelated adults. The keeping of one roomer in an owner-occupied dwelling unit that is occupied by a family is permitted. A non-owner-occupied dwelling unit may only be occupied by a family or a maximum of four unrelated adults.

City of Marquette

T4 General Urban (T4)

This district includes a mix of uses but is primarily in the form of medium intensity residential structures. It may have a wide range of building types: houses, townhouses, duplexes, small apartment buildings, live-work units, and small commercial buildings. Setbacks and landscaping are variable. Commercial uses are freely permitted although the form is more residential in character than the T5 District.

City of Royal Oak

770-71 Senior accessory housing

A single-family dwelling unit may be converted to allow the incorporation (within or attached to an existing dwelling) of one additional dwelling unit for an elderly related person in a residential district subject to the following conditions:

- The dwelling shall be owner-occupied during the duration of the special use permit. The special use permit shall be reviewed by the City every two years from the date of occupancy to determine compliance with all related provisions. The City shall require proof that an elderly family member continues to occupy the additional dwelling unit. This may include but is not limited to a state identification card and/or mail addressed to the individual from federal, state or local agencies or a physician's office. If it is determined by the Zoning Administrator that the permit is in violation of any of the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance or of any other ordinances or regulations of the City, the special land use permit may be suspended or revoked pursuant to § 770-11D, Duration, voiding and extensions of permit.
- The additional dwelling unit shall not exceed 600 square feet of floor area, unless such parts of an existing dwelling are otherwise arranged or designed to be reasonably, conveniently and safely transformed into a slightly larger one-bedroom unit.
- A dedicated off-street parking space shall be provided for the senior accessory unit.
- All residential zoning district bulk and setback requirements shall apply to the site.
- The property owner shall record with the Oakland County Register of Deeds that the property was used under the provisions of § 770-71, Senior accessory housing, contained within the City of Royal Oak Zoning Ordinance and may not be continued as a two-family land use.

Zoning Tools: Minimum Parking Requirements

Figure 14.1: Parking spaces on a commercial property.

Most zoning ordinances require off-street parking to be provided for development. The required number of spaces is typically determined based on the principle use of the property i.e. residential, commercial, or industrial. The number of parking spaces required is typically calculated based on common metrics like number of employees, square footage of the building, the number of residential units or bedrooms, or the number of seats.

Parking requirement can significantly increase the cost of housing by raising construction costs which are passed on to residents. Parking also consumes land which could be used for more housing, mixed uses, or open space. Reducing or eliminating the minimum number of parking spaces required can lower the cost of development to make a housing project more feasible and/or increase the amount of developable land for more housing units.

How can this help or hurt inclusivity?

The relationship between parking, land use, and transportation can create a complex chain of events. Parking minimums drive up housing costs, which inadvertently locates more affordable housing in areas where land is cheaper. In these "more affordable" areas, however, the need to drive and park is prevalent, transit is less likely, and household expenses for vehicle ownership increase. In this way, parking minimums contribute to sprawl and require the need for an automobile as the only reliable or realistic form of mobility, thereby reducing access to jobs, education, medical assistance, recreation, and nearly all other amenities and opportunities. This decreased accessibility most severely impacts people without the means to own an automobile or who cannot drive.

What can you do?

Officials/ Planners: Review the parking requirements for residential uses in your community. When were they last updated? Talk to small- and large-scale developers in your community and find out how expensive it is to develop parking, and how much it adds to the total cost of a project. If eliminating all residential parking requirements is not a good fit for your community, ordinance changes can be done iteratively. Consider decreasing the required parking for a particular housing type. Analyze the outcomes and if it is a success, make additional ordinance changes.

Developers: Politely push back if you are developing in communities with excessive residential requirements. Show planners and officials how much that parking will drive up the cost of construction and therefore the price to buy or rent at that location. Explore how a future resident who cannot drive would get from your new housing development to stores or to work and determine if changing the development's layout or design, or providing additional amenities may make that commute easier, whether by walking, biking, or public transit.

Community Developers: Research the parking requirements are in your community and advocate for change if it is needed.

How addressing minimum parking requirements aligns with MSHDA's Statewide Housing Plan:

Strategy 4.1.D: Incentivize holistic, environmentally just development that provides equitable access to transportation (roads, non-motorized facilities, and/or public transit), child care, economic opportunity, education, and amenities in neighborhoods.

Michigan's Statewide Housing Plan

Example in Michigan or Elsewhere

Traverse City

Eliminated parking minimum requirements in downtown Traverse City decades ago and eliminated parking requirements for residential properties in 2020.

Ann Arbor

Eliminated mandatory parking minimums in August 2022.

Grand Rapids

Eliminated minimum parking requirements in the in certain zoning districts and for small residential developments in April 2024.

Mt. Pleasant

Eliminated minimum parking requirements citywide in 2018.

Zoning Tools: Minimums: Lot Width, Dwelling Size, and Lot Area Requirements

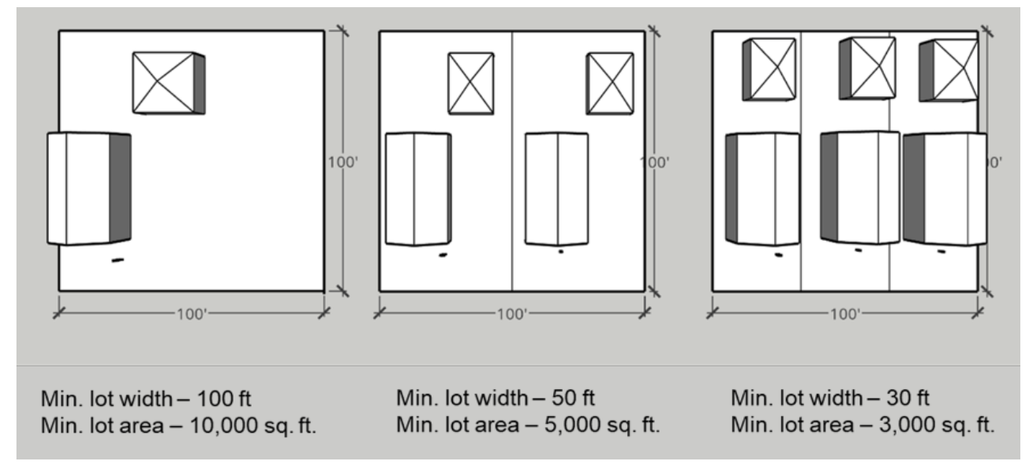

Figure 15.1: Diagram showing different minimum lot sizes.

A common barrier to housing development is strict regulations on minimum lot size, setbacks, and lot coverage which increase the cost of housing by requiring more land per unit. This limits affordability and can slow the construction of new housing starts. Excessive minimum lot size requirements affect housing prices and can stymie infill development by pushing new housing developments to the urban fringe requiring infrastructure investment and increased commute times.

Lot width requirements set the minimum standard for how wide a lot must be to support a particular land use. This is sometimes referred to as a frontage requirement; the amount of road frontage a lot must have. Lot size requirements set the minimum standard for how large a property must be. These two standards combined are often the primary criteria that establish whether a lot is buildable, and they are a significantly impact the likely cost of a home.

Most communities have established a minimum dwelling unit size for various housing types. For example, single-family homes might require a minimum of 1,000 square feet, and multi-family units will have a minimum size that can range from 400 square feet to 800 square feet, depending on the community.

A common rule of thumb is that the home's value will be approximately three times the value of the land it is on. With larger lots in high-demand areas, the land is too expensive to justify building only a small house. Instead, the larger the lot, the more expensive the land. The more expensive the land, the more expensive the home built there. In this way, larger lot sizes can be an exclusionary tactic used to prohibit smaller, less expensive homes. Communities which intentionally zone land to require large lot sizes to discourage smaller, less expensive homes from being built are leaving people behind.

The cost of a home is very often directly related to the size of the house. Size isn't the only factor influencing cost, but it is a significant contributing influence. As a result, when a local community predetermines that all detached homes must be at least 1,000 square feet, the community makes choices on behalf of individual homeowners. From the single widow in their early 60s seeking to transition into a small cottage to the young professional hoping to move out of their parent's house into their first apartment, minimum dwelling unit sizes often have unintended impacts on which housing choices and price points are available in a community.

Why it's an issue for accessibility

Large detached dwellings on large lots are seldom accessible, even if a resident can afford it. They are 2-3 stories tall, typically often with steps to enter the house whether it's through the front door or through the garage. Once inside, there may be a primary bedroom and full bathroom on the first floor, but the rest of the house remains inaccessible.

However, disabled Michigan residents are more likely to live in poverty. In 2019, 21.6% of disabled people were considered poor under the Census's Supplemental Poverty Measure, compared with just over 10% of people without disabilities. While the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits employers from discriminating on the basis of disability, in 2020, workers with disabilities (ages 18–64) were paid, on average, 74 cents for every dollar paid to their nondisabled peers.

Eliminating minimum dwelling size, lot width and area requirements, makes smaller residences possible and drives down the cost of construction, making it more affordable for all Michigan residents.

How addressing lot width, dwelling sizes, and lot area requirements align with RRC Best Practices and MSHDA's Statewide Housing Plan:

RRC Best Practices:

2.4 Housing Diversity: Having an ordinance which clearly allows for diverse housing types creates unique neighborhoods, provides lifestyle options for residents of all ages and income levels, helps attract talent, and provides flexibility for meeting market demand.

MSHDA's Statewide Housing Plan:

Strategy 5.1.A: Review and modify housing programs to remove barriers to expanding and improving older adult housing.

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Michigan's Statewide Housing Plan

What can you do?

Officials/ Planners: Determine if your community has minimum requirements for dwelling size, lot width or lot area. Review the residential building permits obtained in your community—what was the average size for new houses. Could these minimum requirements be playing a role in the type of houses being constructed? Talk to small and large scale developers and inquire about building smaller residences. Their insights will be instructive in crafting new ordinances and policies that would encourage smaller size residences.

Developers: Talk to planners and officials about why developers are no longer building "starter homes." Reach out to community developers about grants and other funding available to build more affordable housing.

Community Development Professionals: Find out if there are minimum dwelling size, lot width and area requirements in your community and advocate for change, if it is needed. Talk with developers about building different kinds of housing. Help developers make connections to alternative funding so more affordable and accessible housing can be built.

Example in Michigan or Elsewhere

Zoning Ordinance Case Study: Traverse City

This block in Traverse City includes lots that range from under 30' to more than 200' in width. Lot areas range from 2,000 sq ft up to ¾ of an acre. The average lot in this neighborhood is roughly 50' x 170' (8,500 sq ft). Yet, other lot sizes (both larger and smaller) coexist nicely. Also included in this image are the estimated values of each home and property. The size of the property is not always the primary indicator of the property's value in this example, and there is a most noticeable correlation in the smaller lots, allowing for more moderately priced properties.

Ch. 1332 – R1a and R1b – Single-Family

- The Single-Family Dwelling—Large Lot (R1a) District is for the purpose of primarily accommodating conventional single-family dwellings.
- The Single-Family Dwelling—Small Lot (R-1b) district is for the purpose of accommodating single-family dwellings on small lots.
- Clustering (e.g., single-family attached, zero-lot line detached dwellings) may be allowed in either district on larger parcels within the designated density guidelines as a means to protect sensitive soils and provide usable open space.

Zoning Ordinance Case Study: Glen Arbor Township

Residence: A dwelling that is designed and built for human occupancy. The dwelling must have a minimum of 480 sq. ft. and a minimum core dimension of 20 feet by 20 feet (400 sq. ft.) The dwelling must have a bedroom, full bath, kitchen/dining area, and a living room. A residence may be occupied full or part-time and is often referred to as a home, house, apartment, condominium, modular home, or mobile home.

Processes: Planned Unit Development (PUD) Standards

Figure 16.1: Cherry Hill Village in Canton, Michigan. One of many PUD's in Michigan.

A Planned Unit Development (PUD) is a flexible zoning approach that allows developers to deviate from standard zoning rules, like setbacks or height restrictions, in exchange for providing benefits like open space, innovative design, higher density, affordable housing, or mixed uses. A PUD is typically used for unique or complex developments that require flexibility. A specific approved plan acts as a customized zoning district. Other terms frequently used interchangeably include cluster zoning, planned development, community unit plan, and planned residential development.

A local unit of government may establish planned unit development requirements in a zoning ordinance that permit flexibility in the regulation of land development, encourage innovation in land use and variety in design, layout, and type of structures constructed, achieve economy and efficiency in

the use of land, natural resources, energy, and the provision of public services and utilities, encourage useful open space, and provide better housing, employment, and shopping opportunities particularly suited to the needs of the residents of this state. The ordinance must also outline the standards for review and approval.

How can this help or hurt inclusivity?

A PUD bundles planning and zoning agreements between a community and a developer that replace the existing zoning regulations. Essentially, the community exchanges its existing regulations for a development that is BETTER than what they would have gotten under those regulations in some way. But the community determines ahead of time how a development must be BETTER (the standards for approval, spelled out in the ordinance) and one of those ways might be that the development provides more accessible housing.

Under a PUD designation, the municipality could ask for, and the developer could provide, many benefits for aging or disabled populations, or families with small children and strollers. Negotiated benefits such as a set number of accessible units with low threshold entries and wider doorways, a mix of housing types to support different income levels, enhanced walkability and integrated green spaces, and mixed uses which include neighborhood commercial that are close and accessible for those without cars would all improve quality of life for all residents, and enhance market appeal for a broad range of potential residents.

What can you do?

Officials/Planners: If your zoning code includes a provision for PUD, review the standards for approval and the approval process to ensure that it is encouraging developers to create unique desired development, while also providing the community with the bargaining power to negotiate for increased public amenities and social and economic benefits for inclusive design. Consider adding those inclusive benefits those above.

Developers: If the community provides a density bonus for affordable housing, offer more barrier free units than legally required under the construction code. Integrate inclusive design elements as part of the community benefits package.

Community Development Professionals: Review the community's PUD ordinance. If barrier free, affordable housing is not listed as an incentive for developers, advocate for this ordinance change. Provide data to officials showing how recent developments could have increased needed housing.

How addressing PUD standards align with MSHDA's Statewide Housing Plan:

Strategy 1.3.C: Incentivize increased numbers of accessible units, including for extremely low incomes, in new development projects.

Michigan's Statewide Housing Plan

Example in Michigan or Elsewhere

City of New Buffalo

The planned unit development including buildings and site features designed with accessible features such as level access from the street and/or zero entry thresholds.

Leelanau Township

Offers a density bonus of 25% if 10% to 20% of the development is affordable to a family earning less than the median income of Leelanau Township.

City of Ann Arbor

Standards for PUD Zoning District Review: "The Planning Commission shall recommend approval, approval with conditions, or denial, and City Council shall approve or deny the proposed PUD zoning district based on the following standards: . . . Expansion of the supply of Affordable Housing Dwelling Units." (Section 5.29.11.F) (page 238)

City of Auburn Hills

The City of Auburn Hills offers zoning and density flexibility through the PUD process if a developer builds at least 75% of the homes in a project that meet the following minimum universal design elements and features.

1. Zero-step front door entryway
2. First floor master bedroom and bathroom with zero-step entry to shower

3. 36-inch wide doorways and 42-inch wide hallways

4. 60-inch wide maneuvering radius in the kitchen and bathrooms

5. First floor laundry room

Austin, Texas

Incentive-based zoning strategies have successfully integrated therapeutic facilities into new developments (City of Austin, 2023). Developers who include therapy centers offering applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy for individuals with autism can benefit from expedited permitting, density bonuses, and financial incentives. These measures promote mixed-use developments that address both housing and healthcare needs, making essential services more accessible to residents. -- from Autism Spectrum News

Processes: Variances

Figure 17.1: A Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting.

A variance is official permission to deviate from a requirement of the zoning ordinance; a tool to provide relief when the strict application of zoning laws creates an "undue hardship" or "practical difficulty." A decision is made by the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), and ZBA decisions can be appealed to the circuit court. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act states that a ZBA may grant a variance if the spirit of the zoning ordinance is observed, public safety secured, and substantial justice done. Additional standards can be adopted within a community's zoning ordinance. The authority to grant a variance is discretionary because the authority to grant a variance relies on the judgment of a reviewing body which allows officials to consider the specific circumstances of each case to determine if granting the variance aligns with the spirit of the ordinance.

There are two types of variances: Use Variances (seeking to use a property in a manner not consistent with the land uses specified in that zoning district) and Non-Use Variances (dimensional). The zoning ordinance includes the general guidelines of practical difficulty for dimensional variances and unnecessary hardship for use variances.

The most common variance is a dimensional or non-use variance. This type of variance is typically granted when a property's unique characteristics, like its unusual shape, narrowness, or topographic conditions, create a "practical difficulty" that makes it unreasonably hard to comply with the ordinance. The non-use variance allows for a reasonable use of land that would otherwise be prevented.
A dimensional variance is official permission to deviate from a zoning regulation's numerical requirements, such as setbacks, building height, lot coverage or parking requirements.

To obtain a dimensional variance, the applicant must demonstrate that a practical difficulty exists on the property. The burden of proof is on the applicant.

As deemed by the Michigan courts, proof of a practical difficulty is the key criteria for an applicant to qualify for a non-use variance. While communities may adopt their own standards, it is a best practice to adhere to the standards established by Michigan case law. This means that the ZBA must find that the applicant has demonstrated a practical difficulty by satisfying all of the mandatory tests:

- Strict compliance with a requirement will have the effect of unreasonably preventing the property owner from using the property for a purpose permitted by the ordinance.
- Substantial justice would be achieved for the applicant as well as for other property owners if the variance is approved.
- The requested variance is the least relief required in order to afford substantial justice for the property owners involved.
- The property is unique.
- The difficulty is not self-created.

How addressing variances align with MSHDA's Statewide Housing Plan:

Goal 5.2: Promote the ability of older adults to age in a place of their choice.

Michigan's Statewide Housing Plan

How can this help or hurt inclusivity?

If a disabled person requires a modification or variance from the zoning ordinance, the procedure and standards are different. The Federal Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibit municipalities from making zoning, land use, or building permit decisions that exclude or otherwise discriminate against protected persons on a case-by-case basis. And this can certainly apply to the variance process.

In order to qualify for a reasonable modification of the zoning ordinance under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the following must apply:

- The person to be accommodated has a disability.
- The requested modification is reasonably necessary to accommodate that disability.
- The modification does not fundamentally and unreasonably alter the nature or purposes of the zoning ordinance. The burden is on the municipality to prove this occurs.

Often zoning ordinances do not include procedures for evaluating a request for accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Federal Housing Act. Staff and appointed officials may wonder when to follow federal law versus state law versus local ordinance.

What can you do?

Planners/Building Officials: Recognize that the ADA and FHA can require modification of the zoning ordinance under different standards than those for a variance request.

Writing and adopting an ordinance and procedure that pertains to ADA modifications in the zoning ordinance makes it clear to citizens and current and future municipal staff that different standards are required when making determinations related to accessibility.

Examples to Consider

Belfast, Maine

Disability Variances

The Zoning Board of Appeals may grant a variance to a property owner for the purpose of making that property accessible to a person with a physical or mental disability who is living on the property. The board shall restrict any variance granted under this subsection solely to the installation of equipment or the construction of structures necessary for access to, or egress from, the property by the person with the disability. The board may impose conditions on the variance, including limiting the variance to the duration of the disability or to the time that the person with the disability lives on the property. For the

purposes of this subsection, the terms "physical or mental disability" and "persons with a disability" are as defined under 5 M.R.S.A. § 4553.

Caroline, Maryland

Reasonable Accommodation Procedure

A reasonable accommodation in the land use, zoning and building context means providing individuals with disabilities or developers of housing for people with disabilities, flexibility in the application of land use, zoning and building code, regulations, policies, practices, and procedures, or even waiving certain requirements, when it is necessary to eliminate barriers to housing opportunities. . . A request for reasonable accommodation may include a modification or exception to the rules, standards and practices for the siting, development and use of housing or housing-related facilities that would eliminate regulatory barriers and provide a person with a disability equal opportunity to housing of their choice.

Orange, Florida

Reasonable Accommodation Procedure

The purpose of a reasonable accommodation is to modify a specific City requirement to ensure an individual with a disability and/or handicap has an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling, building or structure, or to provide accessibility in another manner.

OTHER ORDINANCES AND POLICIES

Zoning is one among a long list of ordinances adopted and enforced by a local government. Below are other ordinances that are under the authority of the local government which can also be created or amended to increase inclusivity in a community.

Other Local Ordinances: Disability Commissions

Figure 19.1: Various people with disabilities.

Boards and Commissions

Most communities have a Boards and Commissions ordinance that describes the purpose, composition, terms, meeting times, vacancies, and compensation (if any) of the various boards and commissions. All boards or commissions have an application and appointment process. Examples of boards and commissions that can influence inclusive policies include parks and recreation, public art, historic preservation, or environmental commissions. Many Michigan communities have formed Commissions for Disability Concerns, Human Rights Commissions, or Affordable Housing Commissions. Commissions like the latter elevate the voices of the disabled in the community. For tips on making

boards and commissions more accessible and inclusive, see the next chapter on Changing Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals recruitment efforts.

The examples below show the respective purposes of several commissions across the state.

A local unit of government can form a Commission on Disability Issues or Concerns the same way they would create any other government committee.

How adding a disability commission aligns with RRC Best Practices:

2.2 Accessibility and User-friendliness: Adding user-friendly components to the zoning ordinance can make it easier to understand, thus removing an initial barrier that disproportionately impacts local, small-scale, and first-time applicants.

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Disability Commissions in Michigan

City of Dearborn Heights

Commission on Disability Concerns

The Commission on Disability Concerns promotes the full integration and participation of persons with disabilities into areas of economic, political, and community life. This commission renders advice, monitors, and evaluates City policies, practices, and procedures, which impact persons with disabilities.

City of Ann Arbor

Commission on Disability Issues

The Commission on Disability Issues meets once per month and works with the City of Ann Arbor to create an Ann Arbor whose facilities, programs, businesses and organizations are accessible to persons of all abilities, and where inclusion and full-and-equitable participation in community life are available to everyone.

City of Warren

Commission on Disability Issues

The primary objective of the Commission is to advise the Mayor and City Council on the development of programs and practices that will improve the access to city services and facilities for people with disabilities, encourage and promote better communication and a greater understanding of people with disabilities in the community and with city employees, boards, and commissions.

City of Ferndale

Accessibility and Inclusion Commission

The commission studies challenges relating to persons with visual, hearing, cognitive, or mobility disabilities and their interaction with the community, and advises City Council on its findings. Members are to include primarily visually, hearing, cognitively and/or mobility disabled individuals or organizations representing them.

Other Local Ordinances: Membership Recruitment for Local Officials

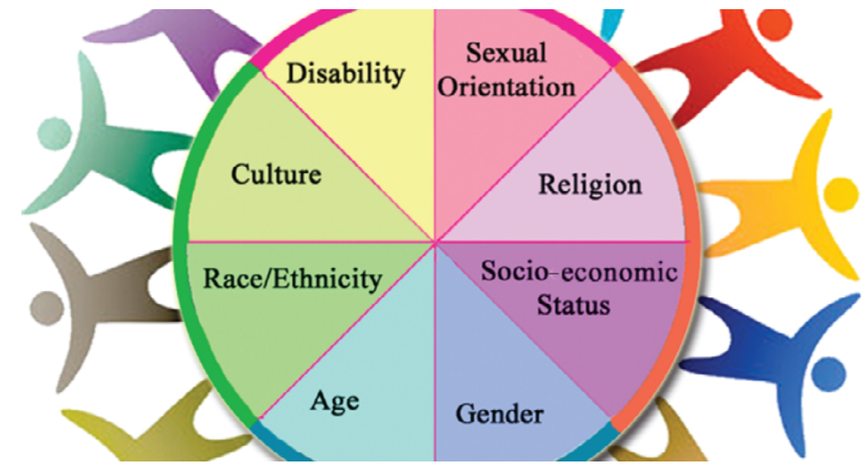

Figure 20.1: Dimensions of diversity.

Changing Membership Recruitment for the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals

Broadly speaking, the purpose and composition of planning commission and the zoning board of appeals are stipulated by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act and the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, respectively, but there are opportunities for a local unit of government to identify additional characteristics and require a more diverse group of members.

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act states that "the membership of a planning commission must be representative of important segments of the community, such as the economic, governmental,

educational, and social development of the local unit of government, in accordance with the major interests of the local unit of government, such as agriculture, natural resources, recreation, education, public health, government, transportation, industry, housing, and commerce. The membership must also be representative of the entire territory of the local unit of government to the extent practicable."

This can also be interpreted to include community members with different perspectives and points of view, including those with disabilities.

Community leaders should embrace diversity and communicate that boards are better when they represent the demographics of the community, including perhaps people who don't look like the current board members or even think like them, but still value the community.

Requiring or encouraging that a zoning board of appeals or a planning commission include members who identify as disabled would provide new perspectives to planning and zoning deliberations and decision making that affect ordinance amendments, variances, and site development reviews.

Reasonable Accommodations

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504, municipalities must provide the accommodations necessary for people with disabilities to fully participate on boards, commissions, committees, and advisory groups — whether they serve as employees, appointees, or volunteers.

- This obligation includes ensuring effective communication and equal access by providing:
- Accessible digital documents
- Screen-reader-friendly materials
- Alternate formats such as audio, large print, Braille, or structured text
- Assistive technology, ASL interpretation, or human reading services
- Remote participation options
- Adjusted timelines or procedures that enable meaningful participation
- Fully accessible physical and digital meeting spaces

Municipalities—not individuals—are responsible for covering the cost of reasonable accommodations. Community members with disabilities should never bear personal expenses to access the information or tools needed to serve.

What can you do?

Appointed or Elected Officials and Planners: Review your community's current recruitment strategy for ZBA and planning commission members. Does it recommend a range of residents with different perspectives and abilities? If your community has a Disability Commission, ask that board and commission recruitment practices, as well as the job descriptions, be reviewed by the Disability Commission, and then institute its recommendations for appointment. If your community doesn't have a Disability Commission, reach out to your local Disability Network Michigan affiliate for their expert advice on recruitment practices, or form one for your community.

Community Development Professionals: Advocate for accessible recruitment that is open to disabled citizens.

Planning Commission Composition

City of Seattle, WA

The membership as a whole shall reflect a broad range of opinion, experience, and expertise with the objective of providing sound advice representative of the citizenry. To achieve that purpose, it shall include residents from different neighborhoods within the City, at least one (1) engineer or architect and an urban planner, and among others, members of ethnic minorities and citizens active in neighborhood or community affairs.

Chapel Hill, NC

Preference given to planning commission applicants who represent at least two of the Planning Commission interest areas in addition to the seat requirements: Pedestrians, people with disabilities, public transit dependent, bicyclists, seniors, student (High School, College), civil engineers, parents, commuters, and the business community.

How addressing membership recruitment aligns with RRC Best Practices:

4.1 Recruitment Process: Having clear and accessible recruitment and appointment procedures reduces barriers to attracting candidates for boards and commissions.

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Other Local Ordinances: Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs)

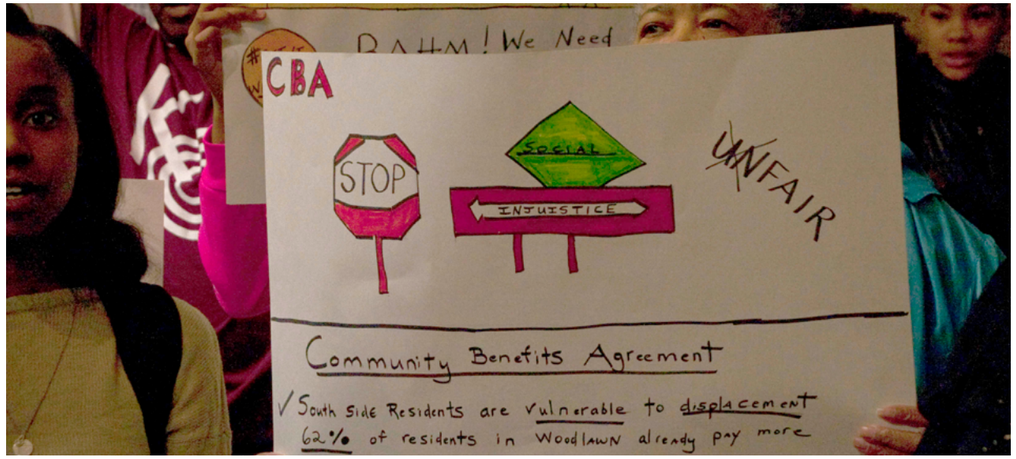

Figure 21.1: Activism to implement community benefits agreements.

Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) are legally binding contracts between coalitions of community-based organizations and developers that shape how local development projects contribute to improving the quality of life of nearby residents. When implemented effectively, CBA processes shift power more evenly to ensure the residents most impacted by development projects have more control on any conditions that are attached to the development's approval.

A municipality also can create a Community Benefits Ordinance (CBO), which requires developers to work with community leaders and commit to providing specific benefits, often in exchange for tax abatements.

CBAs are often used for large developments in a community or neighborhood that has been historically excluded.

How can this help or hurt inclusivity?

Community benefits outlined in a CBA can cover a range of issues prioritized by the community coalition, including affordable housing, barrier free housing, local and targeted hiring, living wage requirements, open space, and other benefits. The terms of the CBA are enforceable by the receiving organizations, providing an additional tool to ensure that the developer complies with the conditions and the terms of approval are being met into perpetuity. When a CBA works well it can help deliver concrete benefits to affected communities.

What can you do?

Officials/Planners: Determine if your community has a CBO. If there are large developments that may potentially displace residents, then you may want to consider adopting a CBO. Work with community groups to determine in advance what the best steps are to ensure that your residents have input into the new investments in your community. To ensure that the approval process is also accessible, leave enough time for community groups to coordinate and react. If your community already has a CBO, meet with community leaders to determine if it is still working as intended. Amend the ordinance, if necessary.

Community Developers: Are there areas of the community that are seeing displacement by large development? Work with fellow community groups to develop a list of priorities for your coalition. Understand that successful CBA campaigns require more than a long list of coalition members and a wish list. Working with developers and local government to create a CBA takes time. Once a CBA is signed, the community coalition must stay involved to hold developers and the local government accountable for implementation. If this sounds like something that can benefit the community, talk with local leaders about developing a CBO.

How addressing CBAs/CBOs align with MSHDA's Statewide Housing Plan:

Goal 5.2: Promote the ability of older adults to age in a place of their choice.

Michigan's Statewide Housing Plan

Example in Michigan or Elsewhere

Hill District, Pittsburgh

Negotiated between the One Hill Neighborhood Coalition and the Pittsburgh Penguins for the development of a new arena. In exchange for community support, the agreement secured an $8.3 million investment in neighborhood improvements, including funds for a new grocery store, local hiring commitments, and living wage requirements for arena employees.

Kingsbridge Armory, New York City

A landmark CBA in 2025 for the armory's redevelopment into a community hub with an event venue, recreational space, and affordable housing. Valued at over $130 million, the agreement includes commitments for local "first source" hiring, union-wage jobs, and a community-governed fund to support local businesses, youth programs, and tenant organizing.

Stellantis Plant, Detroit

Triggered by Detroit's CBO ordinance in 2019, this agreement was negotiated for the $2.5 billion expansion of the Stellantis (then Fiat Chrysler) Mack Avenue plant. The company committed to millions in community investments for home repair, education, and job training, along with a "Detroiters-first" hiring priority.

Other Local Ordinances: Pre-Approved Plans

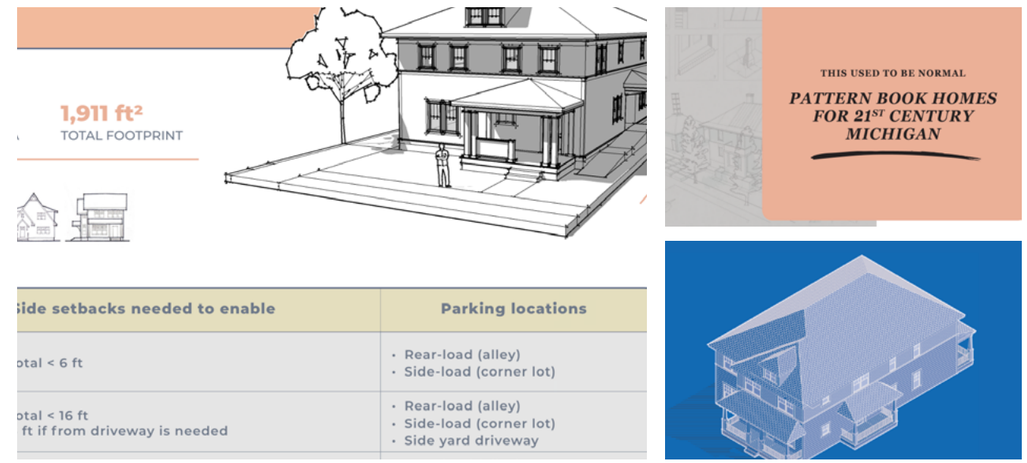

Figure 22.1: Images from MML's Pattern Books Homes and the City of Kalamazoo's Pre-Approved Plans.

Pre-approved housing plans are architectural designs and construction blueprints that have already received approval from municipal authorities or regulatory bodies. These plans adhere to local building codes, zoning regulations and other standards, ensuring compliance with local requirements. By providing a pre-approved framework for residential construction, these plans expedite the development process, and promote efficiency, consistency and regulatory adherence making it faster and cheaper to build new housing units.

Most commonly, pre-approved plans have been developed for single family dwelling units. They are designed to encourage contextually appropriate infill development in developed neighborhoods. But pre-approved plans can be established for all types of development including duplexes, triplexes or

quadplexes; cottage courts; and apartment buildings. Between 1908 and 1940, Sears, Roebuck and Company provided building plans (and materials by mail) for a wide range of residential structures from very modest cottages without indoor plumbing to 4 unit apartment buildings.

How pre-approved plans align with MSHDA's Statewide Housing Plan:

Goal 5.2: Promote the ability of older adults to age in a place of their choice.

Michigan's Statewide Housing Plan

How can this help or hurt inclusivity?

Architectural and building plans are costly. When the municipality assumes the initial cost and effort of creating building plans that comply with all local zoning and building codes, it saves the developer and builder time and money. This makes housing more affordable and lowers the barrier for developers who may want to develop in your community. It also ensures that the community gets exactly the kind of development they want.

And since the municipality is managing the development of the pre-approved plans, inclusive design can be integrated into the plans by including accessibility standards like wider doorways, large turning spaces, and other accessibility features ensuring that the design is universally accessible from the outside, benefiting a wide range of users including those with physical disabilities and seniors.

Investing in pre-approved, accessible house, duplex, or apartment plans presents a real opportunity to show developers how to design for inclusivity and how it can fit into a wide variety of neighborhoods.

What can you do?

Officials/Planners: Advocate and budget for pre-approved plans to be developed by your community.

Developers: Work with disability experts in your area to design and develop homes that have the fewest barriers for future residents.

Community Developers: Advocate for pre-approved plans to be developed in your community. Partner with local governments to develop plans that are accessible and contextual, helping to defray costs for local developers.

Example in Michigan or Elsewhere

The City of Ecorse

The City of Ecorse offers four different ranch style home plans, each designed to be slab-built, universally designed, and fully electric. The plans are also designed to be appealing to those seeking to downsize or build a starter home, two demographics which currently lack housing options in Michigan. The smallest house plan is an 800 square foot one-bedroom layout, while the largest house plan is a 1,000 square foot three-bedroom layout. The plans are free and downloadable.

The City of Kalamazoo

The City of Kalamazoo offers eight housing types, including multiple sizes of two-story single-family homes, three duplex configurations, an ADU, a single-story cottage, and a quadplex. Each plan provides several elevation options to ensure visual variety, even when similar homes are built adjacent to one another. The designs pair modern features and interior layouts with compatibility across Kalamazoo's established neighborhoods. The plans are free and downloadable.

The Michigan Municipal League's Pattern Book Homes for 21st Century Michigan: Volume I: This Used to Be Normal and Volume II: The Missing Middle Mixtape

The Michigan Municipal League's Pattern Book Homes for 21st Century Michigan offer free construction plans for 6 types of dwellings including an ADU, detached dwelling, rowhouse, duplexes, and a quadplex. Grounded in "critical regionalism," it provides Michigan communities practical, locally tailored models that fit naturally within the state's architectural traditions while supporting new housing needs.

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation's (MEDC) Permit Ready Housing Plans

Through a partnership with the MEDC, the Michigan Municipal League (MML), the City of Grand Rapids, and Driven Design, LLC, the MEDC has five (5) complete plan sets available free of charge: three (3) duplex and two (2) quadraplex housing options.

Disability Network Michigan Pattern Book

This collaboratively developed pattern book offers "build-ready" universal design templates—including accessible kitchen and bathroom templates —that can be easily incorporated into new residential construction. Complementing this resource, an introductory video course, recorded at the DAKC Home Accessibility Center, highlights core principles of inclusive residential design.

Construction Codes

Construction codes are rules that specify minimum standards for the design, construction, and renovation of buildings to ensure public health, safety, and welfare. These codes address a wide range of activities including emergency egress, structural integrity, fire protection, electrical and plumbing systems, and accessibility. They are adopted and enforced by local and state governments.

Unlike planning and zoning, communities cannot "opt out" of conformance with construction codes. Municipalities in Michigan are authorized to enforce state-wide construction codes but cannot adopt their own building codes. Municipalities may also delegate enforcement to the county, building authorities, or the state.

The state also authorized the use of the Rehabilitation Code for use of existing buildings. The Rehabilitation Code allows alternative approaches to design and construction to achieve minimum requirements to protect public health and safety.

Accessibility in housing is governed by a combination of:

- Michigan Residential Code (MRC)
- Michigan Building Code (MBC)
- Fair Housing Act (FHA)
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (limited residential application)

Understanding which rules apply depends on:

1. The number of units
2. Whether units are under one roof
3. Whether the building has an elevator
4. Whether the project is built under the Residential Code or Building Code
5. Whether public funding is involved
6. The total number of units on the site

Accessibility requirements can vary by housing and project type.

Single-Family Homes (Detached Dwelling Units)

Is Accessibility Required by Code: No.

Single-family homes built under the Michigan Residential Code are not required to include accessibility features.

Takeaways for Planners, Officials, and Community Development Professionals:

Accessibility may only be encouraged through:

- Zoning incentives
- Development negotiations
- Local policy priorities (aging in place, inclusive design)

Duplexes and Townhouses

Is Accessibility Required by Code: It depends.

If Built Under the Michigan Residential Code (most common):

- Each townhouse is treated as a separate building.
- Accessibility requirements are not triggered.
- The Fair Housing Act does not apply because buildings have fewer than 4 units under one roof.

If Built Under the Michigan Building Code:

- The entire row may be considered one building.
- Accessibility may be triggered depending on:
  - Total units on site or in a building.
  - Presence of elevator
  - Unit configuration (single story vs. multi-story)

Takeaways for Planners, Officials, and Community Development Professionals:

Townhouses are not automatically exempt, although most would be by virtue of being multi-story units. The code path, which is chosen by the developer, determines accessibility requirements.

Multi-Story Townhouses

Multi-story townhouses:

- Are generally excluded from The Fair Housing Act interior accessibility requirements
- Are not required to include Type B units unless elevator-served (see description of Type A and Type B units on page 111)
- May still count toward Type A minimums if part of a 20+ unit Building Code project

Takeaways for Planners, Officials, and Community Development Professionals:

Multi-story design often limits accessibility obligations unless site-wide thresholds are triggered.

Triplex (3 Units)

Is Accessibility Required by Code: It depends.

If the triplex is constructed under:

- **Residential Code**: No accessibility required.
- **Building Code**: The Fair Housing Act does not apply unless 4+ units are under one roof.

However, if the triplex is being planned/constructed as part of a larger development:

- Site-wide Type A requirements may apply if the total unit count for the entire project reaches 20 or more (see description of Type B units on page 111)

Takeaways for Planners, Officials, and Community Development Professionals:

Three-unit buildings generally do not trigger accessibility unless they are part of a larger development subject to Building Code requirements.

Four or More Units Under One Roof (Apartments where the entire building is residential)

Is Accessibility Required by Code: Yes. This is where accessibility requirements begin.

Fair Housing Act (Federal Law)

Applies when:

- The building contains 4 or more dwelling units
- Units are under one roof
- Construction occurred after March 13, 1991

Requirements (No Elevator Building):

- All ground-floor units must meet Type B–like accessibility standards (see description of Type B units on page 111)

Requirements (Elevator Building):

All units served by the elevator must meet Type B standards.

The Fair Housing Act does not require a specific percentage — it applies to all covered units.

Mixed-Use Buildings

When residential units are located above commercial space:

- If 4+ units under one roof: The Fair Housing Act applies
- If elevator is installed: All units served by the elevator must meet Type B (see description of Type A and Type B units on page 111)
- If 20+ units on site: Type A minimums apply

An elevator is not automatically required solely because units are above the first floor. Requirements depend on building code classification and project specifics.

Type A units (see description below), which are more accessible than Type B units, are required when:

- A project is built under the Michigan Building Code
- The site contains 20 or more dwelling units

Minimum requirement:

- At least 2% of units must be Type A (minimum of one unit)

ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) applies to:

- Public spaces
- Leasing offices
- Amenity spaces
- Common areas

ADA does not regulate private dwelling units (except in limited cases such as publicly funded housing).

Benefits of Designing and Building Accessible at the Start Compared to the Cost of Retrofitting Afterward

To design and build an accessible home or apartment using universal design principles from the outset is not much more money than designing a standard unit. See cost differences below:

Unit Type	Typical Cost Difference vs. Standard Unit	Key Cost Drivers
Type A Unit	+10–20% higher than standard units	Larger floor area, specialized fixtures, roll-in showers, accessible cabinetry, more design coordination
Type B Unit	+2–5% higher than standard units	Additional space planning, blocking in walls, minor fixture and door adjustments
Type C Unit (sometimes "Visitable" unit)	+0–2% higher than standard units	Entryway grading, wider doors, accessible route to one bathroom

Under these estimates, a dwelling that costs $200,000 to build as a standard (inaccessible home), would cost around $240,000 if it were designed and built as a Type A dwelling instead. Contrast this with the cost of a retrofit, see Table below.

Retrofit	Scope of Work	Relative Cost vs. New Construction
From Standard to Type A Unit	Major remodel — reconfigure bathroom and kitchen layouts for turning radii and clearances, widen doors, relocate plumbing/electrical, reinforce walls for grab bars, adjust finishes	At least 3–4× higher than adding accessibility in new construction
From Standard to Type C (Visitable) Unit	Light remodel — ensure accessible entry and half-bath, adjust thresholds and door hardware	Comparable to new construction premium; however, the individual design of the residence is an enormous factor on the ability to retrofit.

If that same $200,000 dwelling is now retrofitted to a Type A unit, the renovations will cost at least $120,000.

Elevators are Expensive

Stephen Jacob Smith, founder and executive director of the Center for Building in North America, wrote a guest essay in the New York Times (published July 8, 2024) titled "The American Elevator Explains Why Housing Costs Have Skyrocketed". The essay is summarized below:

The American elevator serves as a microcosm of the challenges plaguing the broader construction industry, explaining why new housing in the U.S. is often expensive, scarce, and of low quality. The author's investigation began after a post viral illness made using the stairs to their third-floor apartment crippling, highlighting the stark contrast with developers in poorer countries like Romania who include elevators in similar-sized buildings.

In North America, elevators have become over-engineered and prohibitively expensive. A basic four-stop elevator costs approximately $158,000 in New York City, compared to about $36,000 in Switzerland. Maintenance and repairs also cost more in America. American elevators are roughly twice the size of those internationally, driven by regulations accommodating large ambulance stretchers, going beyond initial accessibility concerns.

The construction sector is plagued by regulatory inefficiency and outdated standards. The U.S. and Canada have isolated themselves from global best practices by failing to adopt harmonized European elevator standards used throughout much of the world. Furthermore, nearly 100 North American jurisdictions modify the national elevator code, viewing efficient electronic testing practices with suspicion.

Labor shortages exacerbate the cost crisis. This tight market empowers the elevator union, whose contracts forbid standard international practices like preassembly and prefabrication of components, requiring them to be taken apart and reassembled on site to preserve union work.

While single-family homebuilders often use political influence to keep building code costs down, multifamily developers—a weaker constituency—face exploding construction costs. The growing YIMBY (Yes In My Backyard) movement is now shifting focus from restrictive zoning to reforming the technical hurdles embedded in building codes.

To reduce costs and increase production, the U.S. must pursue reforms, including adopting European elevator standards, allowing smaller elevators in small buildings, and improving vocational training and immigration pathways for construction workers. The federal government could enforce change by setting uniform rules that prioritize global best practices and cost, potentially by conditioning housing assistance funds on the adoption of new codes.

Existing Buildings and Conversions

Buildings constructed before March 13, 1991re not subject to Fair Housing accessibility requirements.

Conversions of houses to apartments:

- May use the Michigan Rehabilitation Code
- Often subject to reduced or alternative compliance standards

Takeaways for Planners, Officials, and Community Development Professionals:

Conversions are unlikely to generate new accessibility unless major reconstruction occurs.

Type A vs. Type B Units

Type A (The "Wheelchair Ready" Standard)	Type B (The "Fair Housing" Standard)
These should be fully usable by many wheelchair users without modification. ▪ Larger clear floor spaces ▪ Accessible kitchens and bathrooms designed for immediate use without modificaton ▪ Accessible tub or roll-in showers ▪ Greater maneuverability	Provides a minimum level of accessibility that matches the Fair Housing Act. ▪ Accessible building entrance ▪ 32" minimum clear door width ▪ Reinforced bathroom walls for future grab bars ▪ Usable kitchens and bathrooms ▪ No steps within unit

What can you do?

Elected or Appointed Officials: When reviewing housing or mixed-use developments, know what the minimum code requires and know that you can ask for more. If the community master plan prioritizes barrier free housing or aging in place, make sure the standards for development approval also prioritize barrier free housing.

Developers: While the Michigan Residential Code and the Michigan Construction Code are not subject to local amendments, they are also the minimum required. Consider how inexpensive inclusive design can be when included at the planning stages. For instance, placing wall backing in bathrooms in case grab bars are needed in the future or ensuring that doors are 36 inches wide and there is one zero entry entrance to a house.

Planners: Planners must understand when a barrier free rule is triggered and when it is not. If a project requires a review before the planning commission, that is the time for discussion and negotiation about the project, not when the construction plans are complete. If the community's master plan prioritizes aging in place and inclusivity, the zoning standards for approval should be changed to echo those priorities. The site plan review checklist can also identify what type of residential units (accessible, Type A-C) are proposed.

Building Inspectors/Officials: While the Michigan Residential Code and the Michigan Construction Code are not subject to local amendments, they are also the minimum required. As a building official, you have seen costly renovations or costly changes because a homeowner or developer failed to plan ahead. Consider developing informational handouts, a webpage, or even hosting an event that communicates how inexpensive inclusive design can be when initiated at the planning stage. For instance, placing wall backing in bathrooms in case grab bars are needed in the future or ensuring that doors are 36 inches wide and there is one zero entry entrance to a house, costs very little in advance and can save dollars and heartache in the future.

Community Development Professionals: Consider developing informational handouts, a webpage, or even hosting an event that communicates how inexpensive inclusive design can be when initiated at the planning stage. Attend public meetings where new housing is being considered for site plan review. Ask questions about how accessible that housing is. Make inclusive design a priority.

Examples in Michigan or elsewhere

East Lansing

Given the Michigan Construction Code and Michigan Residential Code limits on requiring accessible housing, municipalities looking to promote more inclusive design, must advocate at the state level for change, but they also must advocate at the local level with developers, builders, and homeowners to create more inclusive communities.

See City of East Lansing's webpage on Fair Housing: https://www.cityofeastlansing.com/FAQ.aspx?QID=147

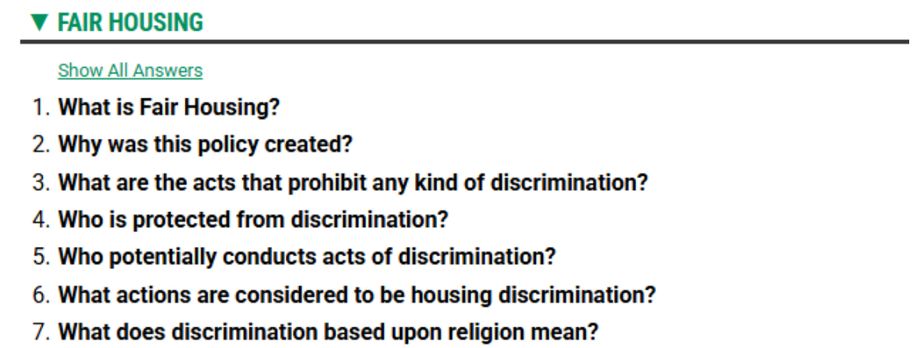

Figure 24.1: A screenshot of City of East Lansing's webpage on fair housing.

Street Design and Transportation

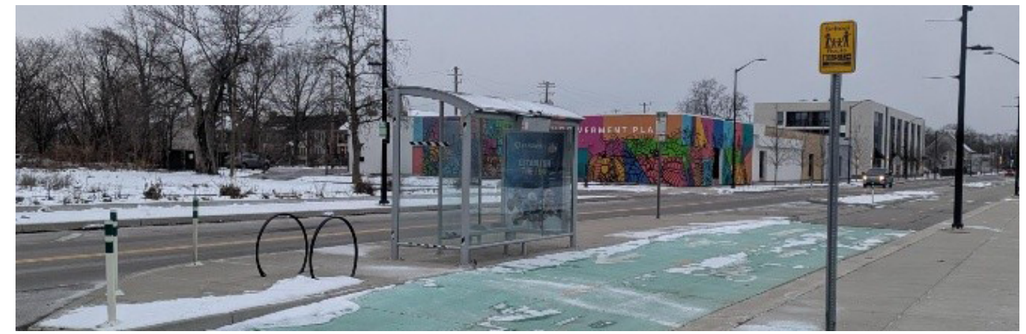

Figure 25.1: Sidewalk level bus boarding area with a separated cycle track.

Streets and transportation systems extend beyond the municipal boundaries and involve many levels of government (federal, state, regional, county and local) to plan, manage, fund, and maintain the roads, highways and transit that connect communities. This makes it difficult for local government to effectively advocate and implement local priorities, whether it is placemaking, complete streets, or inclusive design.

Most transportation systems in Michigan, and in the United States, are automobile-centered and many lack sufficient multi-modal options that make roads safer for all users, and provide alternatives to those who can't, or choose not to, drive. In fact, one-third of the nation's population can't drive due to age, disability, low-income, or lack of a license, and auto-centric systems marginalize those who can't drive. Non-drivers rely on walking, biking or public transit, but many communities lack the infrastructure to make these reliable alternatives.

Advocating for better public transit, walkable and bikable cities, and improved options for everyone – not just drivers – improves quality of life, economic conditions and health.

Below are the myriad standards that civil engineers, planners, public works and traffic safety professionals follow when making street design decisions.

Federal and National Standards

- **Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD):** A fundamental federal resource used to standardize traffic signs, road surface markings, and signals.
- **FHWA – Achieving Multimodal Networks:** This guide focuses on applying design flexibility and reducing conflicts within transportation networks.
- **FHWA – Separated Bike Lane Planning & Design Guide (2015):** Provides planning considerations and a menu of design options for one- and two-way separated bike lanes.
- **FHWA – Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks (2016):** A specialized resource for applying national guidelines and case studies to rural and small-town settings.
- **FHWA – Bikeway Selection Guide (2019):** Assists planners in making safety-focused trade-off decisions regarding various bikeway types.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards:** The 2010 Standards set minimum requirements – both scoping and technical – for newly designed and constructed or altered State and local government facilities, public accommodations, and commercial facilities to be readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.

NACTO (National Association of City Transportation Officials) Resources

- **Urban Bikeway Design Guide (2012/2014):** Provides comprehensive guidelines for bicycle infrastructure, including cycle tracks, signals, and signage.
- **Urban Street Design Guide (2013):** Outlines the principles and practices for designing safe, multimodal urban streets.
- **Transit Street Design Guide (2014):** Offers specific guidance for developing transit facilities on city streets.
- **Urban Street Stormwater Guide (2017):** Details national best practices for sustainable stormwater management within the public right-of-way.
- **Designing for All Ages and Abilities (2017):** A selection guide for urban street types designed to reduce fatalities and increase cycling comfort.
- **Don't Give Up at the Intersection (2019):** Focuses on safe intersection treatments, such as protected corners for pedestrians and cyclists.

AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) Resources

- **Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets:** Provides broad standards for the physical layout and design of various road types.
- **Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities (2012/2021):** Offers standard information for accommodating bicycle travel in most riding environments.
- **Guide for the Planning, Design and Operation of Pedestrian Facilities:** Dedicated guidance specifically for pedestrian-focused infrastructure.

Michigan State Standards and Guidelines

- **Michigan Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MMUTCD) (2013):** Specifies state-specific standards for signs, signals, and road markings.
- **MDOT – Bicycle and Pedestrian Resources for Transportation Professionals (2016):** A resource containing the latest research and guidance on non-motorized planning and safety.
- **MDOT – Best Design Practices for Walking and Bicycling in Michigan:** A toolbox of improvements specifically selected to reduce crashes involving bicyclists and pedestrians in the state.

Local Standards

Street design standards are included in site condominium regulations and subdivision ordinances. For built-out communities, the local government may develop and adopt a street design manual that classifies different typologies in a community and sets priorities for those streets. Kalamazoo's Street Design Manual defines Urban Center Street and characterizes it, in part, as a "high quality streetscape, [with] wide pedestrian areas for outdoor dining, and gathering space is critical; bicycles would typically use parallel streets" and Local Neighborhood Street, described in part, as "low volume and low speed, vehicle travel lanes [that] are typically unmarked."

Developing and adopting a manual can be helpful to describe neighborhood and community goals for streets and to advance conversations with county or state road jurisdictions.

Although compliance with the ADA is mandatory for roadway design and transit providers, it reflects the floor—not the ceiling—of inclusive design, and its implementation can fall short of creating truly intuitive, user-centered environments.

Further, there are established programs to help local leaders plan and implement better and more accessible local streets, including the Disability Network Michigan's "Test Pilot Experience"— an immersive program that originated during the 2012 Michigan Street Corridor Study. This initiative invites design professionals to navigate built environments alongside individuals with disabilities, offering firsthand insight into accessibility challenges and opportunities.

As planners, local officials, and advocates become familiar with available requirements and options, they are better positioned to promote inclusive processes and design solutions that better meet the entire community's needs.

Street and Sidewalk Design Examples:

- Clear wayfinding signage
- Tactile street delineations (truncated domes at street crossings)
- Curbless or shared streets
- Widen and pave road shoulders
- Frequent and flexible seating, with arms and some shaded options
- Pedestrian safety/refuge islands for crossings of more than four lanes of traffic (recommended by the National Association of City Transportation Officials [NACTO]).
- Signal timings for crossings should be appropriately timed, consider timing that includes leading pedestrian intervals (LPIs)—where the pedestrian gets a head start before the right turning vehicles can begin turning.
- Sidewalks and public spaces should be well-lit to avoid glare and deep shadows. This provides comfort to everyone in public spaces and visibility for those with low vision or who use sign language.
- Maintain at least 5 feet of clear sidewalk at all times of the year; this means clearing snow and ice, including the crosswalks and bus stops.

Transit Examples:

- Level transit boarding
- Real-time transit updates on an e-paper viewer with audible options
- Paved paths to bus stops

Next Steps

Where Do We Go From Here?

The Planning and Zoning Toolkit for Inclusive Design lays out a number of regulatory and process tools that, when implemented by municipalities, can make it easier to develop places that are planned, regulated, designed, and built to be accessible and accommodating to people with disabilities. It provides practical guidance for municipal professionals, builders and developers, community development leaders and nonprofit advocates, and residents and business owners to create a built environment that works for everyone, including those with diverse abilities.

Not every tool will work in every municipality, but the solutions included herein are a great start. Municipal leaders, along with myriad partners, must continue to explore additional solutions that will supplement and reinforce those things government DOES have control over: plans and regulations. The planning and regulatory reforms are but one element of a complicated equation that will include myriad additional interventions to truly make meaningful change.

It Starts at Home

Municipal officials and planners must lead the way. By committing to inclusive planning and design, an essential foundation is established for shaping a physical environment where every individual, regardless of age, ability, or background, can participate fully in public life. How municipal leaders show up for the challenge sets an example of leadership for allies and supporters to emulate and support.

Buy in from municipal leaders and professionals is critical to reinforce the WHY of inclusive design policies and help all staff understand the core values, their role in advancing them, and prepares them to become public ambassadors. Educating and training the municipal team is as important as informing the public.

Identify and Embrace Your Allies

Once your internal public team is onboard, look for individuals, groups and organizations that support Inclusive Design principles, share your values, have a stake in the issue, or hold positions of influence in your community. Educate yourself and others about the challenges and experiences of those you are trying to support.

Building a coalition of supporters will make it easier to achieve lasting and meaningful success. People with disabilities and senior citizens, and the organizations that represent them, are a great place to start. Advocacy and non-profit organizations, schools and educational institutions, and local businesses, big and small should be invited to partner. A campaign of inclusion, with a strong coalition of dedicated community partners, can shift a culture of apathy into one of deep commitment and a desire to make real change happen.

Organize Your Supporters

It is important to keep your allies and supporters informed and engaged. Municipal leaders and staff can't effectively champion these priorities without a cadre of local advocates. But municipal leaders CAN set up regular opportunities to meet and engage, take feedback, lead and participate on collaborative projects and initiatives, and serve as the central coordinating entity that holds inclusive design ideals as a high public priority.

Future Work

Culture change is necessary, and while things have certainly come a long way since the ADA was introduced in 1990, with increased mandates, awareness, and resources, many challenges remain. Lack of access to affordable housing in proximity to services persists. Public transit that provides a full travel chain from home to destination is nonexistent except in larger metro areas. Truly accessible public spaces that ensure individuals with disabilities can navigate and participate in public life without barriers are improving, but more must be done to make all of them truly accessible.

An important first step is getting this Toolkit into the hands of planners and other municipal professionals, local elected and appointed officials, and other partners necessary to activate its recommendations. Training is necessary to highlight the planning and regulatory fixes that can integrate inclusive solutions into policies. Technical assistance, particularly for small towns and townships, and rural areas which have limited capacity and rely on volunteers, part-time staff, or professionals who are juggling many different roles, would be of great value.

Equipping professional planners with the knowledge and skills needed to implement the Toolkit's recommendations is also critical to the success of its policy solutions. Direct funding to assist local governments for master planning and code reform is critical if we hope to see transformational change.

The Michigan Association of Planning will develop and deliver many of the training programs noted below, but we will also work with our partners at the Disability Network Michigan, and others that emerge.

Short Range Solutions

Training

Many municipalities do not know where to begin. They do not employ professional planners, lack capacity, or simply have not considered integrating inclusive design best practices into their plans and codes. They may not possess the technical acumen or political will, or even the lexicon to advocate for change. Increasing understanding about the moral imperative – that enlightened, human-centered approach to place building and the inherent worth of every individual in a community – goes hand in hand with increasing technical knowledge. Myriad customized workshop topics would leverage increased knowledge across the various officials, municipal professionals, developers and builders, and advocate working in this space.

Professional Planners and Municipal Professionals

Develop a high-level, technically rigorous workshop curriculum for professional planners, zoning administrators, city managers, township supervisors and administrators and other municipal professional staff. Training would be geared toward those who write the plans and codes.

This course would introduce the Planning and Zoning for Inclusive Design recommendations and improve best practices for inclusive design.

- Management and Leadership Strategy: Ethical and Moral Imperatives, Policy
- Master Planning for Inclusive Design
- Zoning for Inclusive Design
- Community Engagement for Inclusive Design

Elected and Appointed Officials

Develop workshop curriculums for officials focusing policy, public meetings, and community engagement. Training focused on values, informing the community at large about benefits, and commitment for planning and regulatory changes. The program will cover disability awareness, legal frameworks like ADA, and embedding inclusive principles in policy/management.

- Inclusive design basics, and the responsibility of officials to integrate
- Policy Planning and Zoning for Inclusive Design
- Community Engagement for Inclusive Design
- Developers, homebuilders, and housing advocates
- Fair Housing Act, ADA, protected classes

- Design and Construction - Univerisal Design Principles, moving past minimum requirements.
- Practical site design applications (accessible routes, features)
- Marketing/business cases for inclusiveness

All -Audience events: Planners, officials, developers, housers, advocates, disabled, seniors.

Partnering with diverse collaborators to understand, program, and implement inclusive design in your community is foundational to success. While officials must have the will, and planners the technical proficiency to write and adopt the policies, and developers recognize the value of building for disabled individuals, it takes a whole community to really champion the rights of the disabled and to actively support, defend, and build places to ensure that inclusion is advanced for all aspects of community and civic life.

Including disabled people with lived experiences is particularly useful as broad community connections are initiated. Their stories will inform community actions and test policy recommendations. While not technically training, community events and gatherings are a pathway to increasing understanding, empathy and inclusion. The events can take many forms, panels with speakers or meet and greets, focus groups or walk abouts. The purpose is more community building around inclusion than the technical elements of a plan or code.

- Community Building Meetings
- Test Pilot Experiences
- Walking and Rolling Tours
- Building out test pilots in your community
- How to Guides for engaging persons with disabilities (I.e. lived experience) in planning and design efforts in local municipalities.

Mid-Range Solutions

The Planning and Zoning for Inclusive Design Toolkit, and the Pattern Book and Video, are the first-step products that provide tools and resources for municipal leaders, builders and developers, advocates and housers, and others with the desire to improve systems and policies to integrate inclusive design into day-to-day practice. Training is necessary at all levels. Additional guidebooks and toolkits covering

discreet topics that leverage the Planning and Zoning Toolkit can build out a collection of related resources to help widen the selection of options. These include:

1. Inclusive Design for Mobility and Transportation, including guidelines/templates/examples
2. Inclusive Community Design, including guidelines/templates/examples
3. Inclusive Signage/Wayfinding/Devices provided via public investment
4. Public Investment in Inclusive Devices (for example: track chairs for trail access, specialized fishing piers, or inclusive playground equipment)
5. Communications Campaign to support phase one and the items above.
6. Inclusive Housing
7. Developing plans for remodel/renovation projects based off the examples Disability Network Michigan has been developing.
8. Developing an educational home assessment component to guide home modification projects.
9. Full Set of Preapproved Plans for new construction built off of the examples of phase one.

Long Range Solutions

State Legislative Changes

- Planning and building code overlap
  - Elevator reform
- Public Meetings: In Michigan, legislation has been introduced to revise the Open Meetings Act to ensure people with disabilities have the option for virtual participation in public meetings, promoting civic engagement.
- Mandate Use by Right for "Missing Middle" inclusive design requirements for certain housing projects, including zero-step entrances, wider interior doors, and reinforced bathroom walls for future grab bars.
- Housing - legislation for inclusive home design. Proposed federal legislation, like the Eleanor Smith Inclusive Home Design Act, has aimed to require a basic level of accessibility in new federally assisted single-family homes.

Glossary

Adult Foster Care (AFC): A state-licensed residential facility that provides foster care for adults. These are classified by size: a "Family Home" (6 or fewer adults), a "Small Group Home" (12 or fewer adults), or a "Large Group Home" (13–20 adults). For zoning purposes, smaller AFC homes must generally be treated the same as single-family residences.

Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU): A secondary residence that shares a lot or building footprint with a larger primary dwelling. ADUs offer flexibility for aging parents, adult children, or workforce housing and can be freestanding, situated above a garage, or "carved out" of an existing home.

ACS (American Community Survey): A data source from the U.S. Census Bureau used to analyze local trends, such as disability status. While the ACS is a foundational standard for national disability data, it uses a functional definition of disability that may underestimate some portions of the community compared to other metrics.

Capital Improvement Plan (CIP): A multi-year planning schedule that outlines a community's funding and timeline for significant, long-term capital expenditures. The CIP translates the community's vision and Master Plan into tangible physical projects and infrastructure.

Census Levels: The order is State > County > Census Tract > Block Group > Block. Using smaller census levels like block groups offers a more detailed, granular view of a community. However, this detail often comes at the cost of reliability, as the small sample sizes in these areas produce a large margin of error, making the data less dependable.

Closed Session: A meeting of a public body that is not open to observers. These sessions are allowed only under specific circumstances, such as discussing legal strategy or personnel matters, and cannot be used to avoid public scrutiny of planning decisions.

Community Benefits Agreement (CBA): A legally binding contract between a coalition of community-based organizations and a developer. These agreements ensure that local development projects contribute to the quality of life for residents through specific provisions, such as affordable housing, local hiring, or open space preservation.

Construction Codes: State and local regulations specifying minimum standards for the design, construction, quality, and safety of buildings. Unlike zoning, municipalities cannot opt out of

construction codes, which govern critical elements like structural integrity, fire protection, and accessibility.

Cooperative Housing (Co-op): A housing model where residents are shareholders or members of a legal entity that owns the property, rather than owning their individual units. This structure allows members to participate in governance and often lowers housing costs by operating at cost rather than for profit.

Density: The concentration of development within a defined area. Higher density development supports efficient infrastructure use, minimizes urban sprawl, and makes public transit and walkability more viable options for non-drivers.

Design Biases: The inherent exclusions built into a design when it fails to consider diverse perspectives. Inclusive design seeks to recognize and overcome these biases by learning directly from people with a broad range of perspectives.

Economies of Scale (Efficiency in Land Use): The principle that the more of something you make, the cheaper it is to produce each individual unit. The large, upfront costs of production, like building a factory or buying machinery, get spread out over a much larger number of items.

Fair Housing Act (FHA): Federal legislation prohibiting discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, sex, family status, or disability. It prohibits zoning ordinances from restricting housing types, such as group homes, differently than other similar residential uses.

Family (Zoning Definition): A zoning term defining who may live together in a household. Historically restrictive definitions limit households to related individuals, which can exclude non-nuclear families or unrelated individuals sharing costs, such as seniors or people with disabilities.

Geographic Information System (GIS): A technical tool used to perform detailed analysis of community data. In planning, GIS can be used to track where investment is occurring or to identify concentrations of specific demographics to target services effectively. Another way to think of GIS is as a smart map. Instead of a map that only shows streets, GIS can layer different types of information on top of a map so you can see patterns and relationships.

High Contrast: A design consideration essential for accessibility, particularly for people with visual impairments. Materials should avoid light text on light backgrounds (e.g., yellow on white) and instead use high-contrast combinations like black text on white or light-colored backgrounds.

Hybrid Format: A meeting format that creates equitable access by allowing participants to attend either in person at an accessible venue or remotely via digital platforms. A successful hybrid event ensures remote participants can fully engage, ask questions, and comment.

Inclusive Design: A design approach characterized by "designing with all" rather than just "designing for all." It actively involves diverse stakeholders in the process to account for the full range of human diversity including age, mobility, and cognition creating environments that are welcoming to everyone.

Keyboard Navigable: A website accessibility feature that ensures all interactive elements, such as forms and calendars, can be used via keyboard controls rather than requiring a mouse. This is critical for users with mobility impairments who rely on assistive technology.

Master Plan: A comprehensive, long-range policy document that establishes a community's vision for future physical development. It serves as the legal foundation for the zoning ordinance.

Missing Middle Housing: Housing types that bridge the gap between detached single-family homes and larger multi-family complexes. Examples include duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, townhomes, and cottage courts.

OCR (Optical Character Recognition): Technology that allows scanned text (like a PDF image) to be recognized as actual text characters. Documents must be OCR-readable to be accessible to screen readers; standard "flat" images of text cannot be read by assistive software.

Planned Unit Development (PUD): A flexible zoning tool that allows developers to deviate from standard regulations in exchange for providing benefits like open space or affordable housing. It is designed to encourage innovation and achieve economy and efficiency in land use.

Pre-Approved Plans: Architectural designs and blueprints that have been reviewed and approved by municipal authorities in advance. These plans streamline the development process by ensuring code compliance upfront, reducing time and costs for builders.

Police Power: The legal authority that permits a government to regulate the use of private property. Zoning is a form of police power, intended to protect the public health, safety, and general welfare of the community.

Public Body: A government entity, such as a planning commission or council, that gathers to discuss or set policy. Under the Open Meetings Act, these bodies must allow public participation and ensure individuals have the right to address the body.

Reasonable Accommodation: A necessary modification or exception to zoning or building rules that affords a person with a disability an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling. This process eliminates regulatory barriers that would otherwise exclude protected individuals.

Setback: The mandatory distance that must be kept clear between a structure and the property lines. Zoning ordinances typically establish front, rear, and side yard setbacks, which can sometimes create barriers for adding accessibility features like ramps.

Stakeholder: An individual or group with an interest in a planning outcome. In inclusive design, the process emphasizes designing with stakeholders including disabled people, advocates, and caregivers from the very beginning, rather than just designing for them.

State-Licensed Residential Facility: A facility providing care and supervision, such as an Adult Foster Care family home (6 or fewer adults). Under the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, these facilities must be treated as permitted residential uses in all residential zones.

Transportation Oriented Development (TOD): A mixed-use residential and commercial area designed to maximize access to public transport, often incorporating features that encourage transit ridership. A TOD typically creates a compact, walkable neighborhood centered around a transit station or hub, reducing the need for private vehicles and promoting mobility for residents of all ages and abilities.

Type A Unit: A housing unit defined by construction codes as having "High Adaptability." It includes features like blocking for future grab bars and removable cabinets to accommodate residents who may need accessibility modifications later.

Type B Unit: A housing unit defined by construction codes as having "Basic Accessibility." It is designed for residents needing partial accessibility and includes accessible routes and reinforced walls.

Type C Unit (or Visitable Unit): A housing unit defined by construction codes as having "Minimal Accessibility." These units typically feature at least one zero-step entrance, doorways wide enough for a wheelchair (36 inches), and basic access to a bathroom on the main floor, making them accessible for visitors or residents with limited mobility.

Universal Design: The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for specialized adaptation. It focuses on principles such as equitable use, flexibility, and low physical effort.

Variance: Official permission to deviate from the specific requirements of a zoning ordinance. **A Dimensional Variance** provides relief from physical constraints due to practical difficulties, while a **Use Variance** permits a land use that is not otherwise allowed.

Zoning: The public regulation of land use, including the height, area, and placement of structures. Zoning is a government police power intended to protect public health, safety, and welfare by ensuring the compatibility of land uses.

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