

The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy

Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy >> University of Michigan

Michigan Public
Policy Survey May 2018

Approaches to land use planning and zoning among Michigan's local governments

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This report presents the opinions of Michigan's local government leaders on issues related to land use planning and zoning, including use of master plans and capital improvements plans (CIPs), staff or external contractors associated with planning and zoning, perceived benefits to land use planning, and more. These findings are based on statewide surveys of local government leaders in the Fall 2017 wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS).

>> The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) is a census survey of all 1,856 general purpose local governments in Michigan conducted by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan in partnership with the Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Townships Association, and Michigan Association of Counties. The MPPS takes place twice each year and investigates local officials' opinions and perspectives on a variety of important public policy issues. Respondents for the Fall 2017 wave of the MPPS include county administrators, board chairs, and clerks; city mayors, managers, and clerks; village presidents, managers, and clerks; and township supervisors, managers, and clerks from 1,411 jurisdictions across the state.

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Key Findings

- Land use planning is one of the fundamental aspects of local government, and the overwhelming majority of Michigan jurisdictions play a direct role in these decisions through adoption of land use master plans. Overall, about 70% of Michigan jurisdictions report having a land use master plan that covers just their own jurisdiction, while about 5% report having a joint master plan shared with neighboring jurisdictions. Meanwhile, 8% say they rely on their county's master plan to guide land use within their jurisdiction, and 12% report there is no master plan for their jurisdiction at all.
- Most local officials are satisfied with their approaches to planning and zoning (which regulates the use of land through local ordinances, and is often based on a master plan's vision). Officials from jurisdictions with a master plan that covers only their own jurisdiction (82%) or a joint plan (77%) report greater satisfaction with their approach, compared to those who rely on a county-developed plan (62%).
- Statewide, 90% of local officials report that the master plan for their jurisdiction has been updated within the last 10 years, including 28% who say it was updated with the last year.
- Master plans appear to be agents of community continuity more so than drivers of change. In jurisdictions with a master plan, 89% of local officials say the plan's aim is more to preserve the community's current character than to transform the jurisdiction.
- When zoning or rezoning properties, most jurisdictions say decisions are based on the master plan's vision, if not all of its details. Overall, 50% say their jurisdiction generally follows the spirit but not necessarily the letter of the master plan, while 38% indicate that they strictly adhere to the master plan when rezoning properties.
- Less than half (41%) of Michigan local governments with a master plan also have a capital improvements plan/program (CIP), which focuses on the jurisdiction's infrastructure.
- In jurisdictions with their own master plan, 63% of officials believe that their jurisdiction currently has "about the right amount" of staff capacity—internal and/or external—to meet their planning and zoning needs, but a third say they have somewhat too little (22%) or far too little (10%) capacity for their planning needs. Among Michigan's largest jurisdictions, nearly half (48%) say they have too little staff capacity for planning and zoning.
 - » Overall, 50% with their own master plan report their local government has no internal planning staff at all, and nearly another third (31%) report having only part-time planning staff. However, in mid-sized jurisdictions with between 10,001-30,000 residents, 23% have more than one full-time planning employee, and among jurisdictions with more than 30,000 residents, this rises to 58%.
 - » Among those with their own master plan, 64% report they use some external consultants (contracted consultants and/or personnel from other jurisdictions).
 - » Collectively, 16% of jurisdictions with their own master plan report they have no internal planning staff and use no external consultants, leaving planning functions to volunteer planning commissioners. This is most common among the state's smallest jurisdictions.
- When looking at a range of land use issues across the state, medical marijuana is by far the most common topic of discussion, being addressed in 76% of jurisdictions statewide. Other common topics include commercial cellphone towers, farmland preservation, large-scale wind turbines and solar arrays, and short-term property rentals.

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Background

Planning and zoning are fundamental local government processes to manage land use and development. While land use planning typically refers to a long-term vision of future land use that can help shape decisions about the development of the community, zoning comprises the current legal regulations for land use in the present.

In Michigan, local government planning is falls under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA) of 2008,¹ while zoning is covered by the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEa) of 2006.² And although they are governed by two separate pieces of legislation, planning and zoning are inextricably intertwined.

Simply put, planning acts as a guide by identifying community goals for land use. Planning activities are typically undertaken by a planning commission, either within a city, village, or township, or at the county level. The planning commission develops—and regularly reviews—a comprehensive plan (usually called a master plan), which addresses land use and infrastructure issues that may look 20 years or more into the future. Master plans can cover a wide range of land uses and related purposes such as agriculture, residences, industry, recreation, public transportation and infrastructure, public buildings, schools, soil conservation, and more. A master plan might also include transit, water, and sewer maps, as well as subplans that target specific areas of the community. According to the MPEA, the main objective of a plan is to produce development that is coordinated, adjusted, harmonious, efficient, and economical and that best promotes public health and general welfare.³

Meanwhile, zoning provides the rules that legally govern community land use. Local zoning is controlled by a formal zoning ordinance, but, as required by statute, zoning must be based upon an adopted plan. And while a zoning commission (which in most jurisdictions is also the planning commission) makes recommendations for changes to the zoning ordinance, it can only be amended by elected legislative bodies: township boards of trustees, city and village councils, and county boards of commissioners. Furthermore, because a zoning ordinance is law, unlike a master plan, it includes consequences for violations.

As noted by the Michigan Association of Planners, “...the value of any comprehensive plan is directly related to the community’s willingness to follow the plan, and its diligence in keeping the plan current and relevant to today’s conditions. Once adopted the plan must be implemented through appropriate zoning regulations, and changes to the zoning districts or map.”⁴ In other words, the only way the master plan can have an effect on land use is through changes to a local community’s zoning ordinance; it is not enforceable on its own.

Different local jurisdictions approach planning and zoning in different ways. Counties may choose to develop a master plan for the entire county and its environs, but county planning does not officially apply to cities and villages within the county unless those jurisdictions formally incorporate it into their plans. Some counties with plans may also adopt a county-wide zoning ordinance to zone for those townships within the county that do not zone for themselves. Villages may also opt in to this county-wide zoning, but do so rarely. Michigan law also allows for townships, villages, and cities to voluntarily create joint planning commissions to cooperatively plan and zone. And then of course many townships, most villages, and all cities conduct their own zoning, and thus have plans that cover only their own jurisdiction. Interestingly, up until the Fall 2017 MPPS wave, there has been no definitive accounting of which Michigan jurisdictions across the state choose which planning and zoning arrangements, or even how many of these jurisdictions have adopted master plans.

The Fall 2017 MPPS is the first statewide attempt to explore which Michigan jurisdictions actually conduct planning and zoning and how they go about it. The survey asks local officials across the state about basic issues of whether their jurisdiction has its own master plan, relies on a county for planning (or neither), and what personnel they use to support their planning. Further, the MPPS asks for assessments about whether local leaders see benefits from planning or problems from not planning.



Most Michigan jurisdictions have their own land use master plan

How common is land use planning among Michigan local governments? Approximately 70% of the state's cities, villages, and townships report having a land use master plan that covers just their own jurisdiction, while another 5% report having a joint master plan developed collaboratively with neighboring jurisdictions (see *Figure 1a*). In addition, 8% say they rely on their county's master plan for land uses in their own jurisdiction. Meanwhile, 12% report there is no land use master plan for their jurisdiction at all.

Cities overwhelmingly report having their own master plans that covers just their jurisdiction (91%), compared with about two-thirds of villages (64%) and townships (67%). And while only 4% of city officials say there is no master plan for their jurisdiction at all, the same is true for 15% of villages and 13% of townships (see *Figure 1b*).

When looking by community size, as shown in *Figure 1c*, the state's smallest places—those with fewer than 1,500 residents—are the most likely to say there is no master plan for their jurisdiction (22%). Still, a majority (52%) of these smallest jurisdictions report having their own master plans, while another 14% rely on their county's plan for land in their own community. And as population size increases, so does the presence of master plans, as nearly all communities with over 10,000 residents have master plans for land use that cover just their own jurisdiction. There are also regional differences in the adoption of master plans. In the Upper Peninsula, 56% of local leaders report their jurisdiction has its own master plan, while 23% say they have no master plan at all. By contrast, 77% of jurisdictions in Southwest Michigan report having their own master plan, as do 94% of jurisdictions in the Southeast (see *Appendix A* for more information).

Figure 1a

Michigan jurisdictions' approaches to land use planning (among cities, townships, and villages)

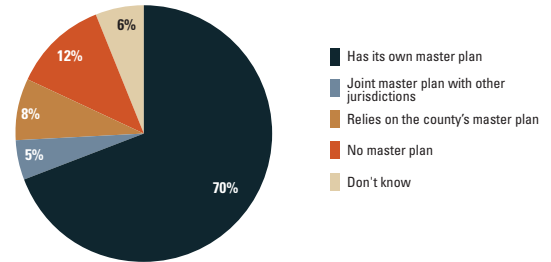


Figure 1b

Michigan jurisdictions' approaches to land use planning (among cities, townships, and villages), by jurisdiction type

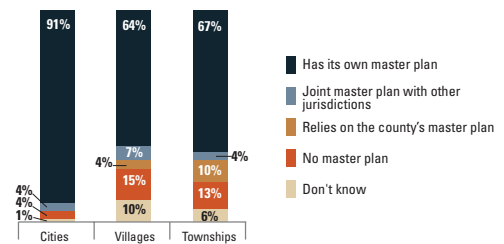
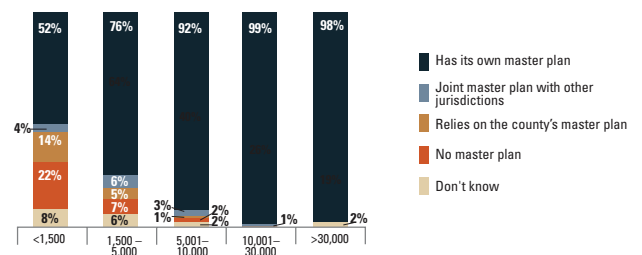


Figure 1c

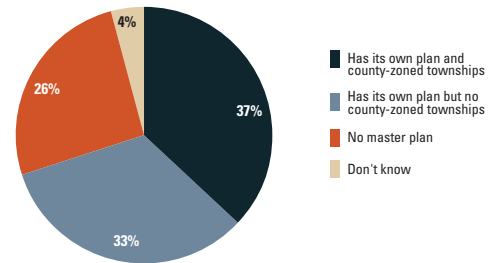
Michigan jurisdictions' approaches to land use planning (among cities, townships, and villages), by population size



Counties play a range of roles in planning and zoning for jurisdictions within their boundaries

Counties in Michigan have a unique role in land use planning. As noted earlier, some counties plan and zone for a limited number of smaller jurisdictions (mostly townships) within the county. Others may develop a master plan for the entire county that acts as an overarching plan for all of the communities within, but one that is simply a guiding document without any enforcement mechanism through zoning. And then some counties choose to take no part in planning and/or zoning. Currently, just over a third of Michigan counties (37%) have a county-wide master plan and manage zoning operations for at least some constituent jurisdictions (see *Figure 2*). Another third (33%) have a county master plan, but do not zone for any of their constituent jurisdictions. And the final groups report either currently having no master plan at the county level (26%), or they don't know the status of county planning (4%).

Figure 2
Michigan jurisdictions' approaches to land use planning (among counties)





Satisfaction with planning and zoning highest among jurisdictions with their own master plan

When asked how satisfied they are with their jurisdiction's approach to land use planning and zoning, 82% of local officials from jurisdictions with their own master plans say they are satisfied, including 40% who are very satisfied with their current approach. Meanwhile, only 8% are dissatisfied (see *Figure 3*). Among jurisdictions participating in a joint master plan, 77% are satisfied, while 11% are dissatisfied.

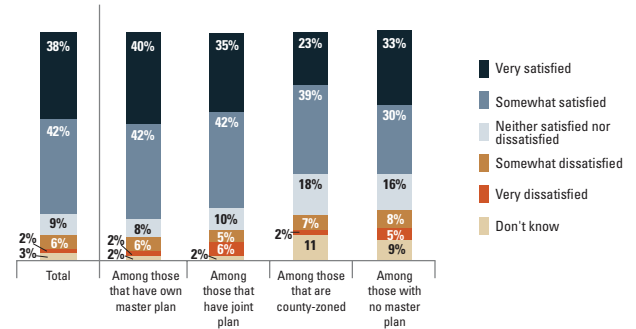
Among townships and villages that rely on their county's master plan, satisfaction is lower (62%), though only 9% say outright they are *dissatisfied* with this approach.

Finally, among those that have no master plan at all, 63% are satisfied with a no-planning approach, while 13% express some dissatisfaction.

Relatedly, the MPPS also asked local leaders to assess satisfaction levels among other stakeholders in their community—their jurisdiction's Board or Council, the local business community, and citizens—with their jurisdiction's approach to planning and zoning. Among those that have their own master plan or operate under a joint or county plan, while 80% of officials say they themselves are satisfied, 70% believe the majority of their local business community is satisfied, 73% believe the majority of their citizens are satisfied, and 84% believe the majority of their Board or Council is satisfied. Among jurisdictions with no master plan at all, local officials' assessments of satisfaction among groups in their community is closely aligned with their own levels of satisfaction.

Figure 3

Local officials' satisfaction with their jurisdiction's current approach to planning and zoning, by zoning type



Over a quarter of jurisdictions covered by a master plan report updates within the past year; townships least likely to see problems with the process

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA) requires jurisdictions with a master plan to review their plan at least every five years. At that review, they are expected to determine whether or not any amendments to the master plan are needed.⁵

Among jurisdictions operating under any type of master plan—a plan that covers just their own jurisdiction, a joint plan, or county-wide plan—the MPPS asked when that plan was last updated (regardless of how recently it was last reviewed). Local officials report that master plan in 90% of jurisdictions have been updated within the past 10 years, including 28% that have been updated in the last 12 months (see *Figure 4*). Meanwhile, 4% have not been updated in at least the last decade.

Local units with a jointly-developed master plan are the most likely to have recently updated their plan, with 38% reporting an update within the past year. Meanwhile, 28% of communities with their own master plan say it has been updated within the past year. Officials from jurisdictions that rely on their county’s master plan are less likely to be part of the review and updating process, and thus nearly half (44%) of officials in those jurisdictions report they don’t know when the master plan was last updated.

The process of reviewing and updating a master plan may pose challenges for a jurisdiction. However, a majority of local leaders (59%) from places with any type of master plan say they have experienced no significant problems recently (or expect no problems) in updating their master plan (see *Figure 5*). By jurisdiction type, township officials are significantly more likely to report or expect no problems when updating their master plan (64%), compared with officials from cities (49%), villages (47%), or counties (38%). By type of plan, jurisdictions with their own master plan are the most likely to report or expect no problems (60%, compared with 54% of those with a joint plan and 45% of those operating under their county’s master plan).

Figure 4

Michigan jurisdictions’ last master plan update (among those that have their own or other master plan), by zoning type

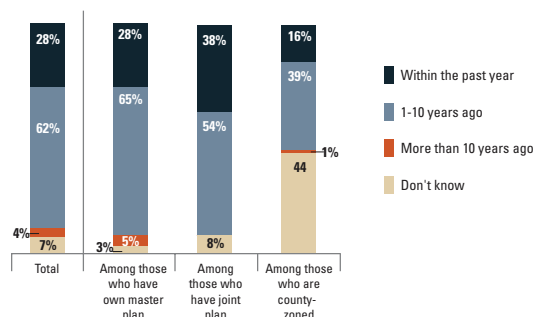
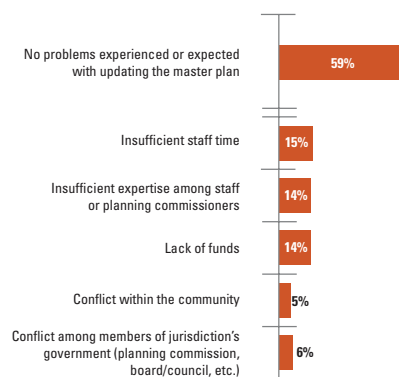


Figure 5

Local officials’ assessments of potential problems with master plan updates (among those that have their own or other master plan)



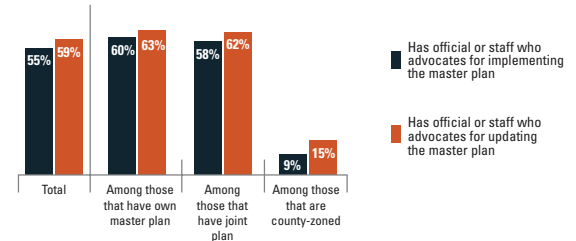


For those who do experience or anticipate problems, officials statewide indicate that issues of resources – insufficient staff time, planning expertise, or funds—are the primary concerns. Approximately a third of county (36%) and city (31%) officials indicate that insufficient staff time is, or would be, a problem in updating their Master Plan, and slightly fewer say lack of funds is or would be a problem (about 30%).

Even though most local leaders have not experienced significant problems—or don’t anticipate any—with updating a master plan, the process can still present challenges. One asset in updating and implementing a master plan is the presence of an advocate or “champion.” This is a person in the jurisdiction, either an elected official or a staff member, who often encourages updating the master plan or consistently reminds the jurisdiction to consider the master plan during decision-making processes.

The MPPS asked local leaders if their jurisdiction has particular staff members or elected officials who regularly advocate for implementation and updating of the master plan. In jurisdictions with any type of master plan, over half (55%) report that they do indeed have a champion for *implementing* the plan, including 60% of those with their own plans and 58% with a joint plan in association with other jurisdictions (see *Figure 6*). Even higher percentages say they have a champion for *updating* the master plan. Unsurprisingly, jurisdictions with a county-developed master plan for land in their own jurisdiction are significantly less likely to have their own champion for updating or implementing the plan.

Figure 6
Percentage of local officials who say planning has a “champion” (among those that have their own or other master plan), by zoning type



Most say their master plan aims to preserve the current character of the jurisdiction, rather than transform it

As outlined earlier, the purpose of a master plan is to provide a vision for future land use across the jurisdiction, including developing and documenting the community's goals, objectives, and policies for growth or redevelopment for the long term. Some jurisdictions might craft their master plan with the goal of preserving the current character of the community into the future. In other places, the master plan might envision a future significantly different than the status quo. When local officials are asked how they would characterize the overarching goal of their jurisdiction's master plan on this continuum, 89% say their plan's aim is to significantly or mostly preserve the community's current character rather than transform the jurisdiction (see *Figure 7a*). It appears that in most communities, master plans are agents of continuity overall, more so than drivers of community change.

However, there are differences in the assessment of master plan goals based on jurisdiction size. While more than a third (35%) of officials from Michigan's smallest jurisdictions say the overarching goal of their master plan is to *significantly* preserve the community's current character, just 14% of officials from the largest jurisdictions say the same (see *Figure 7b*). By contrast, officials from larger jurisdictions are more likely than leaders from smaller places to say that the goal of their master plan is to mostly transform the jurisdiction while still preserving some of the current character, although this still accounts for less than 15% of those larger jurisdictions.

Figure 7a

Local officials' assessments regarding the goal of their master plan (among those that have their own or other master plan)

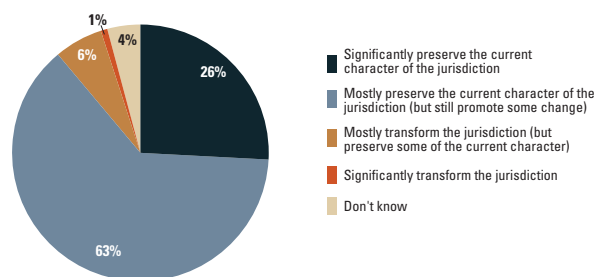
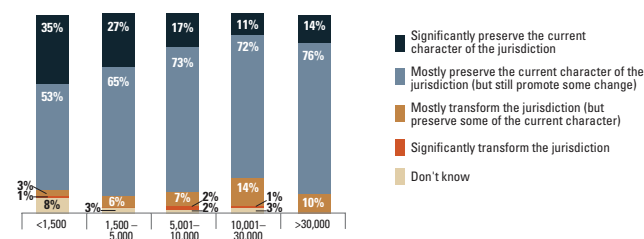


Figure 7b

Local officials' assessments regarding the goal of their master plan (among those that have their own or other master plan), by jurisdiction size





Officials in jurisdictions with land use planning believe it provides a wide range of benefits

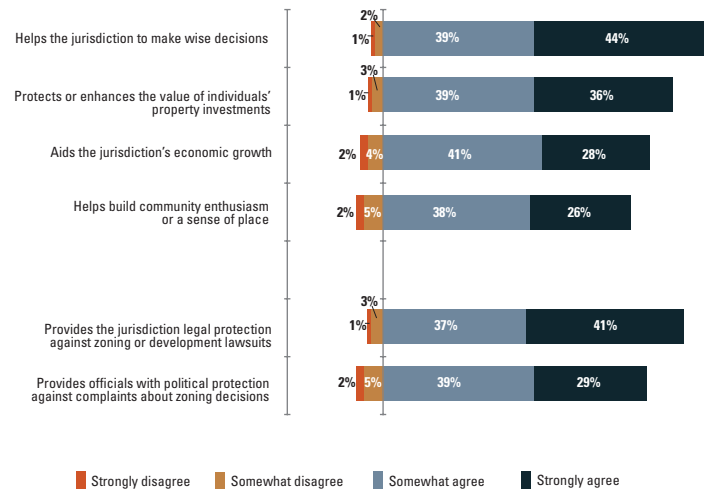
In order to engage in zoning (which allows detailed regulation of land use through local ordinances), the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act requires local governments to first adopt a master plan. To understand local officials' views on land use planning and zoning, the MPPS asked a series of questions to gauge the extent to which local leaders believe that future-oriented land use planning has benefits for their jurisdiction. Among jurisdictions with their own, jointly-developed, or under county master plans, 83% agree that such planning helps the jurisdiction make wise decisions, including 44% who *strongly* agree (see *Figure 8*).

High percentages of local officials also agree that land use planning protects property investments, aids economic growth, and helps build a sense of community or a sense of place. Only a small number of local leaders in Michigan jurisdictions disagree with any of these assessments about planning. Meanwhile, in communities that conduct their own zoning, 78% of officials say land use planning provides the jurisdiction legal protection against zoning or development lawsuits, and 68% say it gives them “political cover” as well, providing support to help make what might otherwise be difficult development decisions.

While there are virtually no differences by jurisdiction type when it comes to these assessments, officials from larger jurisdictions are the most likely to say they strongly agree with statements about the benefits of planning.

Figure 8

Local officials' assessments of the benefits of land use planning (among those that have their own or other master plan)



Note: responses for “neither agree nor disagree” and “don’t know” not shown

Overwhelming majority try to follow master plan's vision, at least in spirit if not to the letter

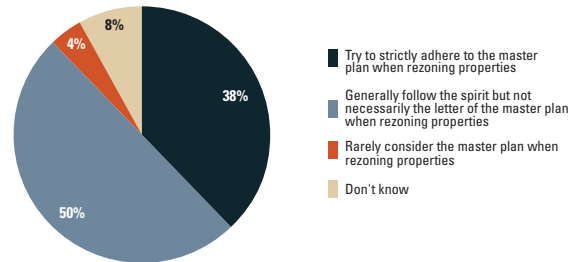
While a master plan provides a non-binding vision for future land use, the jurisdiction's zoning ordinance is the legal means for regulating land use. When it comes to decisions about rezoning particular parcels of property, local Boards and Councils must decide on a case-by-case basis how strictly or loosely to adhere to a master plan's vision. The MPPS asked local officials from jurisdictions with control over their own zoning to what degree they generally consult their master plan in rezoning decisions. Statewide, just over a third (38%) of local leaders in jurisdictions that zone indicate that they strictly adhere to the master plan when rezoning properties (see *Figure 9*). Meanwhile, half (50%) say their jurisdiction generally follows the spirit but not necessarily the letter of the master plan when rezoning properties. Just 4% indicate that their master plan is rarely considered when rezoning properties.

Township officials (40%) are more likely to say their jurisdiction strictly adheres to the master plan when rezoning properties compared with county (37%), city (35%), or village (31%) officials. In addition, officials from the Southeast (43%) and Southwest (42%) regions are more likely to say their jurisdiction strictly adheres to their master plan, compared with officials from the Northern Lower Peninsula (29%) or the Upper Peninsula (22%).

Among those who say they “strictly adhere” to the Master Plan in rezoning, when asked what actions the jurisdiction usually takes to keep the zoning ordinance aligned with the master plan, 65% say they consult the master plan goals and objectives when making any zoning decisions or ordinance updates, and 54% say they ensure applicant-led rezoning requests follow the master plan's future land use map. However, only 16% indicate they go so far as to preemptively rezone to keep aligned with the master plan's future land use map.

What are some of the reasons a jurisdiction would not follow its master plan to the letter when making zoning decisions? Among those local leaders who say that their jurisdiction “generally” or “rarely” follows the master plan when rezoning, nearly half (43%) assert that their master plan wasn't intended to be a blueprint for zoning. Another 22% say that some parts of their master plan are out-of-date. Finally, 16% believe there isn't community consensus on some elements of the master plan, and therefore it is not strictly followed.

Figure 9
Local officials' assessments of how their jurisdiction uses the master plan in rezoning decisions (among those that zone themselves)





Most jurisdictions hold public hearings on zoning issues at least a few times annually, and related controversies are fairly common

The MPPS also asked local officials how often their jurisdiction holds public hearings for zoning actions (for example, rezoning requests, site plan reviews, special use permits, etc.). Among jurisdictions that are zoned, 14% say they hold public hearings for zoning actions at least once a month, while 45% hold them a few times each year, 20% hold only one or so each year, and 20% rarely or never hold such public hearings at all (see *Figure 10*). Unsurprisingly, smaller zoned jurisdictions report holding these kind of public hearings significantly less frequently than larger zoned jurisdictions, likely reflecting a smaller number of proposed development projects. Among the smallest zoned communities, 63% of officials report holding public hearings for zoning actions once a year or less. By contrast, half (50%) of the largest zoned jurisdictions hold public hearings on zoning at least once a month.

Development projects often seem to drive local controversy, leading to a range of efforts by opponents to prevent or alter proposed projects, sometimes including “NIMBYist” reactions to potential community change. And in fact, the MPPS finds that zoning-related controversies are fairly common, with 44% of zoned jurisdictions statewide reporting land use controversies once a year or more (see *Figure 11*). Not surprisingly, the frequency of such controversies is related to the frequency of zoning activities, which as noted above is itself related to community size. Among the largest zoned jurisdictions, almost half (47%) report such controversies at least a few times each year, and another 29% report them at least once per year.

Figure 10

Local jurisdictions' frequency of public hearings on zoning actions (among those that conduct their own zoning or are zoned either by the county or a joint authority), by population size

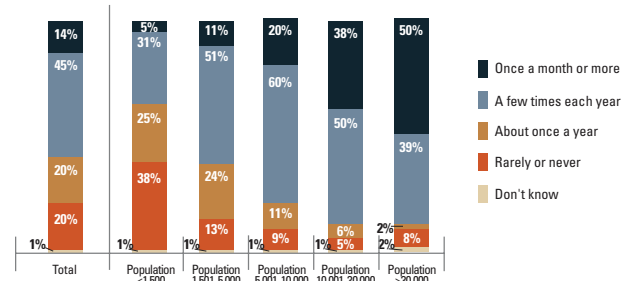
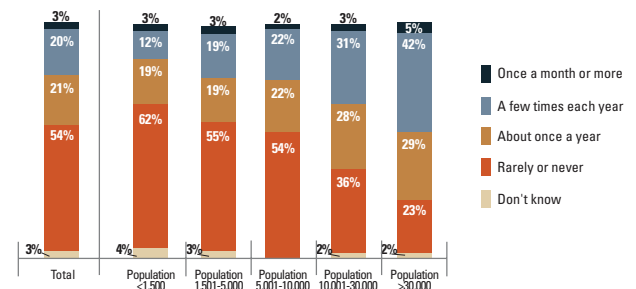


Figure 11

Local jurisdictions' frequency of controversies related to zoning actions (among those that either conduct their own zoning or are zoned by the county or a joint authority), by population size



Many Michigan local governments also have capital improvement plans that focus on infrastructure

In addition to more general land use planning, many jurisdictions also engage in planning specific to infrastructure. Capital improvement plans or programs (CIPs) provide a working blueprint for sustaining and improving the community's public infrastructure. CIPs often include a multi-year schedule or prioritization of big-ticket expenditures such as individual capital projects on public buildings or other infrastructure, equipment or land purchases, and major studies related to future capital projects.⁶ CIPs are only required by the MPEA within those jurisdictions that provide utilities.⁷ According to local officials, 41% of jurisdictions in Michigan with a master plan currently also have a formal CIP for their jurisdiction's infrastructure, facilities, or equipment. Another 7% report having had a CIP sometime within the last decade (see *Figure 12a*). Meanwhile, 38% of local officials statewide report having no CIP for their jurisdiction, and another 15% are unsure.

Michigan local governments with a CIP vary by size, since larger jurisdictions are significantly more likely to provide utilities, and thus are required to adopt CIPs. Approximately 24% of officials from the state's smallest jurisdictions (among those with master plans) report their government has a formal CIP, compared with 75% of the largest jurisdictions (see *Figure 12b*). Looking regionally, fewer jurisdictions from East Central Michigan (30%) report they have a formal CIP, compared with communities in West Central (43%), Southwest (44%), or Southeast (56%) Michigan.

CIPs can also act as a means of prioritizing the order or funding of particular capital projects. According to local leaders, just over a third (35%) of those with CIPs report they prioritize their CIP projects "a great deal" based on their support of the jurisdiction's overall master plan. However, more than half (53%) indicate that they prioritize CIP projects only "somewhat" based on the master plan (see *Figure 13*), and another 7% of jurisdictions with CIPs indicate they do not prioritize capital projects to support the master plan at all.

Figure 12a
Percentage of Michigan jurisdictions with a formal capital improvements plan/program (among those that have their own or other master plan)

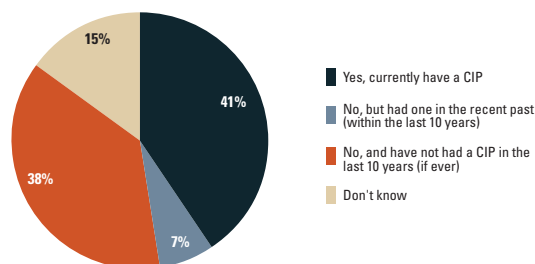


Figure 12b
Percentage of Michigan jurisdictions with a formal capital improvements plan/program (among those that have their own or other master plan), by population size

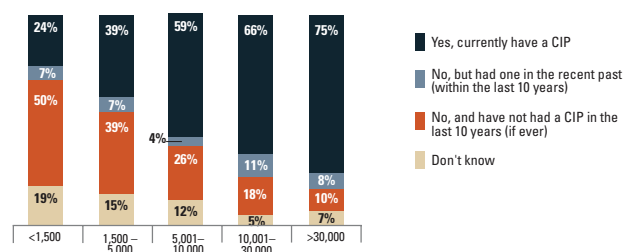
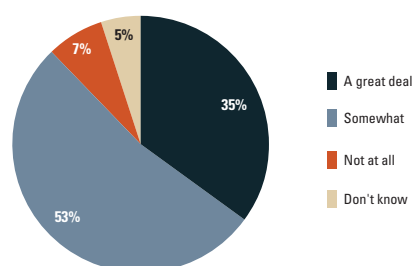


Figure 13
Local officials' assessments of the extent that CIP projects are prioritized based on support of a master plan (among those that currently have a CIP)





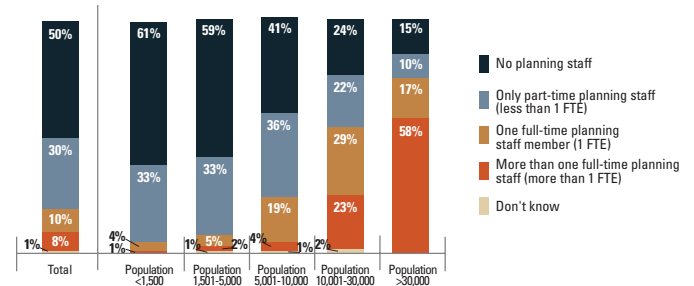
Among jurisdictions with their own master plan, a majority have no internal planning staff

What kind of human resource capacity do local governments have for land use planning? Looking specifically at jurisdictions that report having their own master plan (excluding those operating under either joint plans or county planning and zoning), the MPPS asked whether there are any full- or part-time planning employees on the jurisdiction's own staff. Statewide, a majority (50%) report their local government has no planning staff at all, and nearly a third (30%) report having only part-time planning staff (see *Figure 14*). However, this is strongly correlated with a jurisdiction's population size. Relatively few smaller local governments (with fewer than 10,000 residents) report having full-time planning staff, while such staff are much more common among the state's larger jurisdictions. For example, in mid-sized jurisdictions with between 10,001-30,000 residents, nearly a quarter (23%) have more than one full-time planning employee, and among those jurisdictions with more than 30,000 residents, this rises to 58%.

See *Appendix B* for percentages of jurisdictions with internal planning staff broken out by jurisdiction type, size, and region.

Figure 14

Percentage of local jurisdictions with full- or part-time planning staff (among those that have a master plan that covers only their jurisdiction), by population size



Instead of employing their own planning staff, many jurisdictions that have their own master plan use external consultants. Among jurisdictions that use external planners, 42% say they engage them intermittently, and another 18% report specifically using external consultants to review complex site plans for proposed developments (see *Figure 15*). Meanwhile, one in five (20%) local governments that do their own planning keep external consultants on long-term retainer. Overall, 31% of jurisdictions with their own master plan do not use any external consultants for planning and zoning.

See *Appendix C* for percentages of jurisdictions that use external planners broken out by jurisdiction type, size, and region.

Taking both of these questions together, 16% of local jurisdictions that have their own master plan report using no internal or external personnel as planners. In these jurisdictions, planning and zoning is left to the volunteers who make up the planning commission or to the local officials themselves. Having no internal or external planning personnel is most common among the state's smallest jurisdictions (see *Figure 16*). Among those jurisdictions with more than 5,001 residents and their own master plan, fewer than 5% report having no planning staff or consultants. By contrast, over a quarter of (27%) of the state's smallest jurisdictions that have their own master plan say they have no internal or external paid planning personnel.

Figure 15

Percentage of local jurisdictions that use external planners (among those that have a master plan that covers only their jurisdiction)

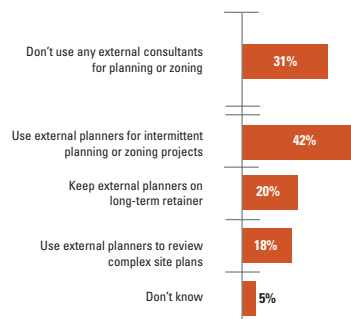
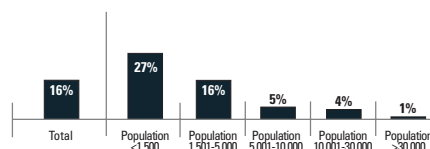


Figure 16

Percentage of local jurisdictions that have no internal planning staff or external consultants (among those that have a master plan that covers only their jurisdiction), by population size





One-third of local officials say they have too little planning capacity overall

Among those jurisdictions with their own master plans, most local officials (63%) report their government currently has “about the right amount” of staff capacity—internal and/or external—to meet their planning and zoning needs (see *Figure 17*). Only a handful of jurisdictions (1%) say they currently have too much staff capacity, but a substantial number (32%) express concern that they have either somewhat too little (22%) or far too little (10%) capacity for their planning and zoning needs. Among Michigan’s largest jurisdictions, nearly half (48%) say they have somewhat or far too little staff capacity for planning and zoning, while the same is true among 51% of officials from cities of all sizes.

The MPPS has previously reported that in the wake of the Great Recession, many local governments reduced their number of public employees and that those overall numbers have not yet returned to pre-Recession levels.⁸ The Fall 2017 MPPS asked specifically about increases or decreases to planning staff over the past 10 years to get a sense of how this capacity has changed. Most local officials (59%) in jurisdictions with their own master plan report their current staff capacity for planning and zoning has not changed significantly compared to 10 years ago (see *Figure 18*). Meanwhile, slightly more report increased staff capacity over the past decade (18%) than report decreased capacity (15%).

But even among jurisdictions that have seen their planning capacity expand recently, some say they still have too little staff capacity. Among those that report having somewhat or significantly increased planning staff over the past decade, around a quarter feel they still have somewhat (19%) or far too little (5%) staff capacity. And among jurisdictions with their own master plan that have somewhat or significantly decreased their planning staff, only 35% say they currently have the right amount of capacity, while nearly two-thirds express concern they have somewhat (40%) or far too little (22%) staff capacity for their planning and zoning needs.

Figure 17

Local officials’ assessments of their jurisdiction’s staff capacity for planning and zoning (among those that have a master plan that covers only their jurisdiction), by population size

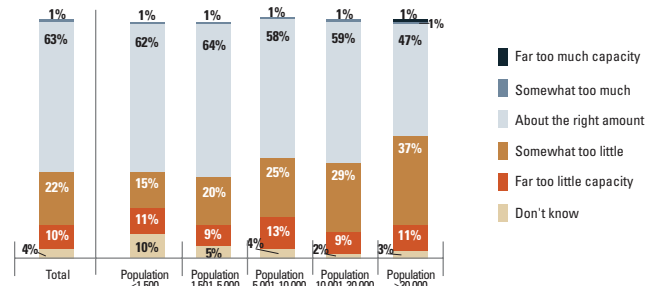
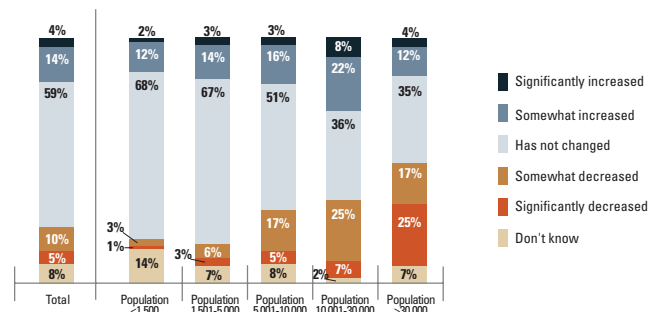


Figure 18

Local officials’ assessments of change in jurisdiction’s staff capacity for planning and zoning over past 10 years (among those that have a master plan that covers only their jurisdiction), by population size



Those with no master plan cite lack of people, expertise, and funds, and they are unlikely to adopt plans in near future

Turning to those 12% of jurisdictions that report having no master plan at all, the MPPS asked whether these local officials feel their jurisdiction has experienced any significant problems due to the lack of structured land use planning. Only a small number (6%) believe their jurisdiction has experienced any significant problems for lack of a master plan, while a wide majority (86%) report no significant problems (see *Figure 19*).

When looking at reasons why a local jurisdiction might choose not to adopt or pursue a master plan, 60% of local officials point to a lack of local volunteers to participate on planning and zoning boards (see *Figure 20*). Other issues that impact a jurisdiction's decision not to adopt a master plan include lack of expertise or funds. In addition, some local officials say their governing Board does not believe the jurisdiction needs a master plan, or that they don't believe the government should engage in planning and zoning.

Looking ahead, only about a quarter (27%) of officials from local jurisdictions currently operating without a master plan predict their jurisdiction will be very likely (11%) or somewhat likely (16%) to adopt a land use master plan in the next few years (see *Figure 21*).

Figure 19

Percentage of local jurisdictions that have experienced problems from not having a master plan (among those that do not have their own or other master plan)

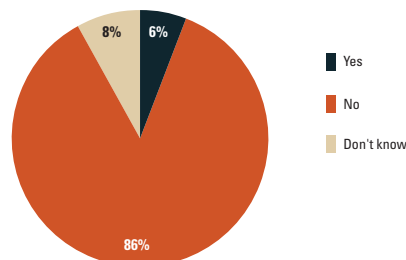


Figure 20

Local officials' assessments of jurisdiction's decision not to have a master plan for land use (among cities, villages, and townships that do not have their own or other master plan)

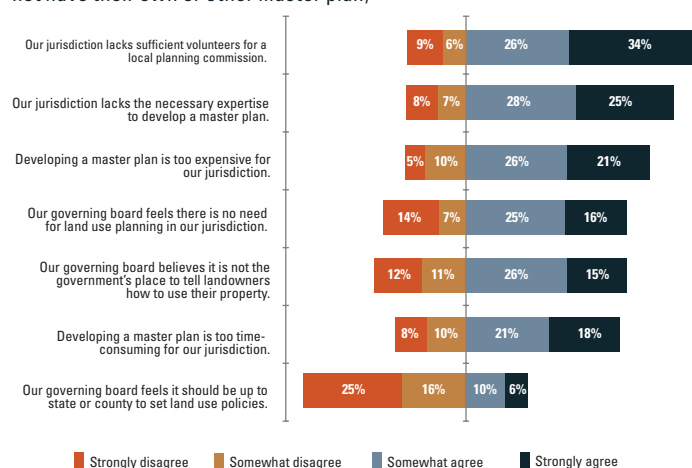
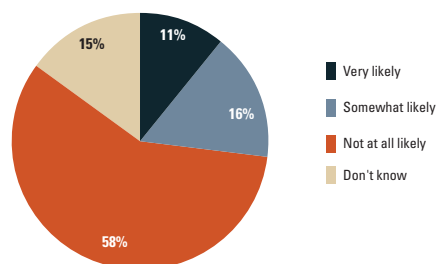


Figure 21

Likelihood local jurisdictions will adopt a master plan in the next few years (among those that do not have their own or other master plan)





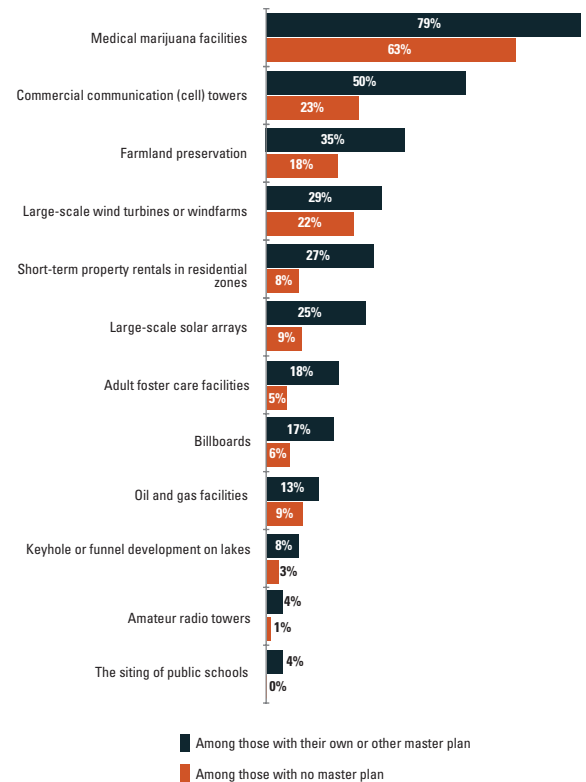
Statewide, medical marijuana is by far the most common topic of discussion in terms of planning and zoning

Finally, the MPPS asked local officials—from jurisdictions that are doing land use planning and from those that are not—about land use issues that are current topics of discussion within their local government, including discussion at Board or Council meetings. Out of a list of 12 different land-use policy areas, medical marijuana was by far the most frequently mentioned topic of local discussion, by 79% of jurisdictions with a master plan and by 63% of jurisdictions with no master plan (see *Figure 22*). Given recent changes to Michigan’s state regulations governing medical marijuana facilities and requirements for local jurisdictions to choose whether to allow facilities in their community or not, it is not surprising the issue is one of the most talked about at the local level.⁹ Other common land use topics of discussion include commercial cell phone towers, farmland preservation, large-scale wind turbines and solar arrays, and short-term property rentals such as those through services like Airbnb.

See *Appendix D* for percentages of all 12 land use issues broken out by jurisdiction type, size, and region.

Figure 22

Percentage of officials who report various land use issues that have been a topic of discussion within local government



Conclusion

When it comes to land use planning in Michigan communities, most local officials (70%) report that their local government has a land use master plan that covers just their own jurisdiction, with small percentages alternatively adopting joint master plans with neighboring jurisdictions (5%) or operating under their county's master plan (8%). Only 12% of local officials report that there is no Master Plan for their jurisdiction at all. For those who operate under any type of master plan, 90% say it has been updated within the past 10 years, including 28% who say it's been updated in the last 12 months.

Regardless of the land use planning approach they use, local officials' satisfaction with how their jurisdiction conducts planning and zoning is relatively high, with those who have a master plan generally agreeing that planning provides a wide array of benefits, such as helping the jurisdiction make wise decisions, protecting property investments, aiding economic growth, and helping build a sense of community or a sense of place.

When it comes to the staffing resources devoted to planning, 63% of officials in jurisdictions with their own master plan believe their jurisdiction has "about the right amount" of staff capacity—internal and/or external—to meet their planning and zoning needs currently, but a third say they have somewhat too little (22%) or far too little (10%) capacity. Even among jurisdictions that report having increased planning staff over the past decade, 24% say their staff capacity is too low. And among those jurisdictions that currently report having no master plan at all, 60% of local officials point to a lack of local volunteers to participate on planning and zoning boards as a reason for not adopting one.



Notes

1. Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2008). Retrieved from <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-33-of-2008.pdf>
2. Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (Act 110 of 2006). Retrieved from [http://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(x3eqqx2ix0ez34nsk1zysl45\)/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-110-of-2006.pdf](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(x3eqqx2ix0ez34nsk1zysl45)/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-110-of-2006.pdf)
3. Michigan Economic Development Corporation. (2018). *Master plan update guide*. Retrieved from http://www.michiganbusiness.org/cm/Files/Redevelopment_Ready_Communities/Master-Plan-Guide.pdf
4. Michigan Association of Planning. (2018.) *Relationship between the comprehensive plan and the zoning ordinance*. Retrieved from https://www.planningmi.org/downloads/the_zoning_ordinance.pdf
5. Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2008).
6. Center for Land Use Education. (2008). *Planning implementation tools: Capital improvement plan*. Retrieved from https://www.uwsp.edu/cnr-ap/clue/documents/planimplementation/capital_improvement_plan.pdf
7. Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2008).
8. Fitzpatrick, N., Horner, D. & Ivacko, T. (2018). *Workforce issues and challenges for Michigan's local governments*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Retrieved from <http://closup.umich.edu/files/mpps-workforce-2017.pdf>
9. Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs. (2018). *Medical marihuana facility licensing*. Retrieved from <http://www.michigan.gov/lara/0,4601,7-154-78089---,00.html>

Survey Background and Methodology

The MPPS is a biannual survey of each of Michigan's 1,856 units of general purpose local government, conducted once each spring and fall. While the spring surveys consist of multiple batteries of the same "core" fiscal, budgetary and operational policy questions and are designed to build-up a multi-year time-series of data, the fall surveys focus on various other topics.

In the Fall 2017 iteration, surveys were sent by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) via the internet and hardcopy to top elected and appointed officials (including county administrators and board chairs; city mayors and managers; village presidents, clerks, and managers; and township supervisors, clerks, and managers) from all 83 counties, 280 cities, 253 villages, and 1,240 townships in the state of Michigan.

The Fall 2017 wave was conducted from October 3 – December 11, 2017. A total of 1,411 jurisdictions in the Fall 2017 wave returned valid surveys (67 counties, 226 cities, 176 villages, and 942 townships), resulting in a 76% response rate by unit. The margin of error for the survey for the survey as a whole is +/- 1.28%. The key relationships discussed in the above report are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level or below, unless otherwise specified. Missing responses are not included in the tabulations, unless otherwise specified. Some report figures may not add to 100% due to rounding within response categories. Quantitative data are weighted to account for non-response. "Voices Across Michigan" verbatim responses, when included, may have been edited for clarity and brevity. Contact CLOSUP staff for more information.

Detailed tables of the data analyzed in this report broken down three ways—by jurisdiction type (county, city, township, or village); by population size of the respondent's community, and by the region of the respondent's jurisdiction—are available online at the MPPS homepage: <http://closup.umich.edu/mpps.php>.

The survey responses presented here are those of local Michigan officials, while further analysis represents the views of the authors. Neither necessarily reflects the views of the University of Michigan, or of other partners in the MPPS.

Appendices

Appendix A

Michigan jurisdictions' approaches to land use planning, by jurisdiction type, size, and region (among townships, cities, and villages)

	Townships	Cities	Villages	Total
Yes, our jurisdiction currently has its own master plan	67%	91%	64%	70%
Yes, we have a joint master plan under an agreement with other jurisdictions	4%	4%	7%	5%
Yes, we rely on the county's master plan for our jurisdiction	10%	0%	4%	8%
No, our jurisdiction does not currently have a master plan (either our own, a joint plan, or a county plan)	13%	4%	15%	12%
Don't know	6%	1%	10%	6%

	<1,500 Population	1,500-5,000 Population	5,001-10,000 Population	10,001-30,000 Population	>30,000 Population	Total
Yes, our jurisdiction currently has its own master plan	52%	76%	92%	99%	98%	70%
Yes, we have a joint master plan under an agreement with other jurisdictions	4%	6%	3%	1%	0%	5%
Yes, we rely on the county's master plan for our jurisdiction	14%	5%	1%	0%	0%	8%
No, our jurisdiction does not currently have a master plan (either our own, a joint plan, or a county plan)	22%	7%	2%	0%	0%	12%
Don't know	8%	6%	2%	0%	2%	6%

	Upper Peninsula	Northern Lower Peninsula	West Central Lower Peninsula	East Central Lower Peninsula	Southwest Lower Peninsula	Southeast Lower Peninsula	Total
Yes, our jurisdiction currently has its own master plan	56%	59%	68%	63%	77%	94%	70%
Yes, we have a joint master plan under an agreement with other jurisdictions	3%	6%	3%	7%	6%	2%	5%
Yes, we rely on the county's master plan for our jurisdiction	14%	15%	6%	11%	3%	0%	8%
No, our jurisdiction does not currently have a master plan (either our own, a joint plan, or a county plan)	23%	13%	15%	12%	8%	2%	12%
Don't know	5%	6%	8%	6%	6%	2%	6%

**Appendix B**

Percentage of local jurisdictions with full- or part-time planning staff (among those that have a Master Plan that covers only their jurisdiction), by jurisdiction type, size, and region

	Counties	Townships	Cities	Villages	Total
No planning staff	38%	52%	38%	64%	50%
Only part-time staff	20%	33%	25%	28%	30%
One full-time staff member	10%	8%	19%	7%	10%
More than one full-time planning staff	27%	6%	17%	1%	8%
Don't know	4%	1%	0%	0%	1%

	<1,500 Population	1,500-5,000 Population	5,001- 10,000 Population	10,001- 30,000 Population	>30,000 Population	Total
No planning staff	61%	59%	41%	24%	15%	50%
Only part-time staff	33%	33%	36%	22%	10%	30%
One full-time staff member	4%	5%	19%	29%	17%	10%
More than one full-time planning staff	1%	2%	4%	23%	58%	8%
Don't know	0%	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%

	Upper Peninsula	Northern Lower Peninsula	West Central Lower Peninsula	East Central Lower Peninsula	Southwest Lower Peninsula	Southeast Lower Peninsula	Total
No planning staff	57%	48%	40%	58%	56%	47%	50%
Only part-time staff	30%	36%	39%	30%	28%	22%	30%
One full-time staff member	9%	8%	12%	6%	9%	14%	10%
More than one full-time planning staff	4%	8%	7%	5%	6%	15%	8%
Don't know	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

Appendix C

Percentage of local jurisdictions that use external planners (among those that have a Master Plan that covers only their jurisdiction), by jurisdiction type, size, and region

	Counties	Townships	Cities	Villages	Total
Don't use any external consultants for planning or zoning	32%	34%	18%	37%	31%
Use external planners for intermittent planning or zoning projects	37%	37%	55%	42%	42%
Keep external planners on long-term retainer	10%	19%	25%	14%	20%
Use external planners to review complex site plans	11%	17%	23%	17%	18%
Don't know	16%	5%	3%	4%	5%

	<1,500 Population	1,500-5,000 Population	5,001-10,000 Population	10,001-30,000 Population	>30,000 Population	Total
Don't use any external consultants for planning or zoning	48%	27%	16%	21%	25%	31%
Use external planners for intermittent planning or zoning projects	36%	44%	45%	44%	43%	42%
Keep external planners on long-term retainer	8%	19%	35%	29%	27%	20%
Use external planners to review complex site plans	10%	23%	21%	22%	12%	18%
Don't know	6%	5%	6%	3%	6%	5%

	Upper Peninsula	Northern Lower Peninsula	West Central Lower Peninsula	East Central Lower Peninsula	Southwest Lower Peninsula	Southeast Lower Peninsula	Total
Don't use any external consultants for planning or zoning	43%	36%	31%	42%	32%	14%	31%
Use external planners for intermittent planning or zoning projects	42%	42%	46%	36%	46%	39%	42%
Keep external planners on long-term retainer	2%	11%	14%	11%	15%	45%	20%
Use external planners to review complex site plans	7%	13%	16%	18%	23%	24%	18%
Don't know	9%	8%	4%	5%	5%	3%	5%

**Appendix D**

Percentage of officials who report various land use issues that have been a topic of discussion within local government, by jurisdiction type, size, and region

	Counties		Townships		Cities		Villages		Total
	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	
Medical marijuana facilities	59%	29%	82%	68%	82%	80%	70%	52%	76%
Commercial communication (cell) towers	44%	13%	51%	26%	52%	41%	42%	14%	45%
Farmland preservation	53%	40%	46%	19%	4%	10%	13%	8%	32%
Large-scale wind turbines or windfarms	39%	40%	0.37	25%	7%	0%	0.14	10%	28%
Short-term property rentals in residential zones	20%	9%	24%	6%	40%	8%	23%	18%	23%
Large-scale solar arrays	20%	24%	31%	9%	11%	0%	12%	3%	22%
Adult foster care facilities	13%	4%	13%	5%	33%	12%	23%	7%	16%
Billboards	2%	0%	16%	6%	27%	33%	10%	5%	15%
Oil and gas facilities	23%	15%	16%	10%	6%	0%	7%	5%	12%
Keyhole or funnel development on lakes	0%	4%	12%	3%	1%	0%	2%	0%	7%
Amateur radio towers	3%	0%	4%	1%	5%	0%	2%	0%	4%
The siting of public schools	3%	0%	2%	0%	7%	0%	9%	2%	3%

	<1,500 Population		1,500-5,000 Population		5,001-10,000 Population		10,001-30,000 Population		>30,000 Population		Total
	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	
Medical marijuana facilities	74%	62%	82%	73%	85%	82%	86%	30%	73%	29%	76%
Commercial communication (cell) towers	41%	20%	53%	31%	51%	41%	61%	0%	58%	16%	45%
Farmland preservation	30%	13%	41%	24%	35%	12%	27%	0%	29%	48%	32%
Large-scale wind turbines or windfarms	30%	20%	0.36	24%	16%	0%	0.16	0%	17%	48%	28%
Short-term property rentals in residential zones	22%	9%	26%	6%	27%	12%	37%	0%	37%	11%	23%
Large-scale solar arrays	20%	7%	32%	11%	27%	0%	14%	0%	23%	29%	22%
Adult foster care facilities	10%	5%	16%	6%	27%	0%	35%	0%	33%	5%	16%
Billboards	8%	6%	17%	6%	17%	41%	31%	0%	35%	0%	15%
Oil and gas facilities	12%	9%	13%	9%	14%	15%	12%	0%	16%	12%	12%
Keyhole or funnel development on lakes	8%	2%	10%	3%	7%	0%	7%	0%	4%	5%	7%
Amateur radio towers	2%	1%	5%	2%	6%	0%	8%	0%	3%	0%	4%
The siting of public schools	2%	1%	5%	0%	3%	0%	7%	0%	5%	0%	3%

Appendix D Continued

Percentage of officials who report various land use issues that have been a topic of discussion within local government, by jurisdiction type, size, and region

	Upper Peninsula		Northern Lower Peninsula		West Central Lower Peninsula		East Central Lower Peninsula		Southwest Lower Peninsula		Southeast Lower Peninsula		Total
	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	With own or other master plan	With no master plan	
Medical marijuana facilities	70%	59%	78%	67%	78%	64%	77%	56%	86%	70%	83%	60%	76%
Commercial communication (cell) towers	43%	13%	48%	24%	54%	20%	44%	31%	51%	23%	56%	40%	45%
Farmland preservation	12%	7%	30%	11%	45%	24%	43%	28%	43%	19%	26%	13%	32%
Large-scale wind turbines or windfarms	17%	25%	0.25	11%	27%	14%	53%	0.45	27%	11%	18%	27%	0.28
Short-term property rentals in residential zones	32%	7%	41%	11%	28%	11%	14%	5%	24%	3%	24%	19%	23%
Large-scale solar arrays	8%	7%	11%	4%	21%	3%	43%	21%	34%	6%	24%	20%	22%
Adult foster care facilities	8%	7%	12%	2%	20%	3%	17%	9%	17%	6%	27%	6%	16%
Billboards	20%	7%	13%	4%	18%	4%	11%	13%	16%	3%	22%	0%	15%
Oil and gas facilities	5%	7%	2%	15%	10%	5%	12%	17%	11%	6%	17%	0%	12%
Keyhole or funnel development on lakes	4%	4%	12%	0%	11%	5%	4%	0%	10%	3%	7%	6%	7%
Amateur radio towers	3%	2%	5%	2%	4%	0%	3%	0%	5%	0%	4%	0%	4%
The siting of public schools	3%	0%	3%	0%	4%	0%	3%	2%	5%	0%	6%	0%	3%



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Michigan local governments actively promote U.S. Census participation (August 2010)

Fiscal stimulus package mostly ineffective for local economies (May 2010)

Fall 2009 key findings report: educational, economic, and workforce development issues at the local level (April 2010)

Local government officials give low marks to the performance of state officials and report low trust in Lansing (March 2010)

Local government fiscal and economic development issues (October 2009)

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The **Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP)**, housed at the University of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, conducts and supports applied policy research designed to inform state, local, and urban policy issues. Through integrated research, teaching, and outreach involving academic researchers, students, policymakers and practitioners, CLOSUP seeks to foster understanding of today's state and local policy problems, and to find effective solutions to those problems.

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