

Best Practice 2: ZONING

2.1 Alignment with Master Plan

Under Michigan law, zoning ordinances must be based on an adopted master plan. Ensuring such coordination reduces uncertainty and risk for development.

CRITERIA: The governing body has adopted a zoning ordinance that aligns with the goals of the current master plan.

ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
☐ The community has evaluated the master plan's recommendations to determine if changes to the zoning map or ordinance are needed.	☐ The community has evaluated the master plan's recommendations to determine if changes to the zoning map or ordinance are needed. ☐ The community has made updates to the zoning ordinance to align with the goals and zoning recommendations from the master plan.

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.

CRITERIA: The zoning ordinance is accessible and user-friendly.

ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
☐ The ordinance and zoning map are accessible online.	☐ The ordinance and zoning map are accessible online. ☐ The ordinance portrays clear definitions and requirements. ☐ The ordinance includes graphics, tables or charts.

2.3 Concentrated Development

Allowing for areas of context-sensitive concentrated development provides myriad benefits including enabling pedestrian mobility, providing a sense of place, generating fiscal stability for communities, and leveraging existing infrastructure.

CRITERIA: The zoning ordinance provides for areas of concentrated development in appropriate locations and encourages the type and form of development desired.

ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
☐ The ordinance allows mixed-use buildings by-right in designated areas of concentrated development. The ordinance requires ONE or more of the following elements in areas of concentrated development: ☐ Build-to lines ☐ Open store fronts ☐ Outdoor dining ☐ Minimum ground floor transparency ☐ Front-facing doorways ☐ Parking located in the rear of the building ☐ Walk-up windows ☐ Public art program ☐ Temporary or permanent parklets	☐ The ordinance allows mixed-use buildings by-right in designated areas of concentrated development. The ordinance requires TWO or more of the following elements in areas of concentrated development: ☐ Build-to lines ☐ Open store fronts ☐ Outdoor dining ☐ Minimum ground floor transparency ☐ Front-facing doorways ☐ Parking located in the rear of the building ☐ Walk-up windows ☐ Public art program ☐ Temporary or permanent parklets

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.

CRITERIA: The zoning ordinance allows for a variety of housing options.

ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
The ordinance allows for TWO or more of the following housing types by-right: ☐ Accessory dwelling units (ADU) ☐ Townhouses/rowhouses ☐ Triplexes ☐ Quadplexes ☐ 6-plexes ☐ Commercial ☐ Stacked flats ☐ First-floor residential with commercial ☐ Residential above commercial ☐ Micro units ☐ Cottage housing/bungalow courts ☐ Tiny houses	The ordinance allows for THREE or more of the following housing types by-right: ☐ Accessory dwelling units (ADU) ☐ Townhouses/rowhouses ☐ Triplexes ☐ Quadplexes ☐ 6-plexes ☐ Commercial ☐ Stacked flats ☐ First-floor residential with commercial ☐ Residential above commercial ☐ Micro units ☐ Cottage housing/bungalow courts ☐ Tiny houses

2.5 Parking Flexibility

The cost and space consumed by parking can make or break a project financially. Providing flexible options for parking allows for creative and context-sensitive solutions in communities of all sizes and reduces the negative impacts excessive parking can have on a community’s sense of place.

CRITERIA: The zoning ordinance includes flexible parking requirements.	
ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
The ordinance includes regulations for TWO or more of the following tools approved either administratively or by the planning commission: ☐ Reduction or elimination of required parking when on-street or public parking is available ☐ Connections between parking lots ☐ Shared parking agreements ☐ Parking maximums ☐ Elimination of parking minimums ☐ Parking waivers ☐ Electric vehicle charging stations ☐ Bicycle parking ☐ Payment in lieu of parking ☐ Reduction of required parking for complementary mixed uses ☐ Banked/deferred parking	The ordinance includes regulations for THREE or more of the following tools approved either administratively or by the planning commission: ☐ Reduction or elimination of required parking when on-street or public parking is available ☐ Connections between parking lots ☐ Shared parking agreements ☐ Parking maximums ☐ Elimination of parking minimums ☐ Parking waivers ☐ Electric vehicle charging stations ☐ Bicycle parking ☐ Payment in lieu of parking ☐ Reduction of required parking for complementary mixed uses ☐ Banked/deferred parking

2.6 Green Infrastructure

Integrating green infrastructure can reduce infrastructure and maintenance costs, provide opportunities for recreation and physical activity, reduce exposure to harmful substances, advance placemaking goals, improve safety, promote community identity and a sense of well-being, and provide economic benefits.

CRITERIA: The zoning ordinance includes standards for green infrastructure.	
ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
N/A	The ordinance includes regulations for THREE or more of the following: ☐ Low impact development techniques (rain gardens, bioswales, etc.) ☐ Rain water collection (blue roofs, cisterns, water harvesting, stormwater vaults, etc.) ☐ Green roofs ☐ Permeable pavement ☐ Steep-slope protections ☐ Street-tree planting standards ☐ Tree preservation or replacement standards ☐ Parking lot internal landscaping standards ☐ Open space preservation development (i.e., cluster housing) ☐ Required native or low-maintenance plantings ☐ Renewable energy ☐ Buffering standards around water bodies or other natural resources ☐ Off-site stormwater regulations allowing site developers to participate in district-scale stormwater management plans

Best Practice 3: DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

3.1 Defined Processes

Clearly defined development review processes provide predictability for investments big and small.

CRITERIA: The zoning ordinance includes clear steps for major development review processes.

ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
☐ Processes for site plan review, special land use, rezoning, variances, and text amendments are clearly laid out in the zoning ordinance.	☐ Processes for site plan review, special land use, rezoning, variances, and text amendments are clearly laid out in the zoning ordinance.
☐ Development review standards are clearly defined.	☐ Development review standards are clearly defined.

3.2 Point of Contact

Having a clearly identified point of contact helps communities offer positive and personalized service which builds a foundation for a predictable development review experience.

CRITERIA: The community has clearly identified a point of contact for development review activities.

ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
☐ The community has an identified development review point of contact, which is clearly indicated on the website.	☐ The community has an identified development review point of contact, which is clearly indicated on the website.

3.3 Conceptual Review

Conceptual review meetings offer a chance for early, informal review of proposed projects. This helps avoid costly mistakes or delays later in the process.

CRITERIA: The community defines and offers conceptual review meetings for applicants.

ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
☐ The community advertises online that conceptual site plan review meetings are available.	☐ The community advertises online that conceptual site plan review meetings are available.
	☐ The community has clearly defined expectations posted online and a checklist to be reviewed at conceptual meetings.

Best Practice 3: DEVELOPMENT REVIEW *continued*

3.4 Internal Review Process

Clearly documenting the internal review process provides predictability and consistency in the development review process. It also ensures that processes can continue in the event of staff turnover.

CRITERIA: The community has a clearly documented internal staff review policy.

ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
The internal review process addresses the following: ☐ Key steps of the application from submittal to issuing of the permit ☐ Timelines ☐ Identifies who reviews applications ☐ Identifies approval standards	The internal review process addresses the following: ☐ Key steps of the application from submittal to issuing of the permit ☐ Timelines ☐ Identifies who reviews applications ☐ Identifies approval standards ☐ The community has established a joint review team.

3.5 Approval Authority

Approving permitted uses at the planning commission or staff level allows faster approval and respects the administrative nature of development review.

CRITERIA: The community streamlines the approval process by using administrative and planning commission approval authority.

ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
☐ Site plans for permitted uses are approved administratively or by the planning commission.	☐ Site plans for permitted uses are approved administratively or by the planning commission. ☐ Permitted uses do not require a formal public hearing (but allow for public comment and other engagement as deemed necessary).

3.6 Fee Schedule

Having a fee schedule allows an applicant to clearly understand their likely costs upfront, reducing surprises further in the process.

CRITERIA: The community maintains a fee schedule.

ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
☐ The fee schedule is available online in an easy-to-find location.	☐ The fee schedule is available online in an easy-to-find location. ☐ The fee schedule is reviewed annually and updated as needed.

Best Practice 3: DEVELOPMENT REVIEW *continued*

3.7 Payment Methods

Clearly identifying methods of payment reduces uncertainty. Communities that accept credit cards offer a highly sought after, modern option that adds flexibility.

CRITERIA: The community offers clear methods of payment.

ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
☐ The community clearly indicates on its website accepted method(s) of payment for development fees.	☐ The community clearly indicates on its website accepted method(s) of payment for development fees. ☐ The community accepts credit card payment for development fees.

3.8 Access to Information

Having key information and forms available online (or organized into a guide) reduces the number of questions the point of contact will need to address and increases the likelihood of a successful development review experience from the beginning.

CRITERIA: The community makes development review information and forms readily available online.

ESSENTIALS EXPECTATIONS	CERTIFIED EXPECTATIONS
The community's website includes the following essential items: ☐ Zoning ordinance ☐ Meeting information ☐ Application(s) for site plan ☐ Special land use, rezoning, variance ☐ Zoning text amendment and zoning permits ☐ Fee schedule ☐ Conceptual meeting availability	The community has compiled a "Guide to Development," which includes the following: ☐ Relevant contact information ☐ Relevant meeting schedules; flowcharts of development review processes ☐ Conceptual meeting procedures ☐ Relevant ordinances to review prior to application submission ☐ Applications for all major development review processes (at least site plans, special land-uses, variances, and rezoning) ☐ Explanation of approval authority for development review processes ☐ Fee schedule ☐ Special meeting procedures ☐ Financial assistance tools ☐ Design standards and other local guidelines ☐ Information on building processes and contacts ☐ The "Guide to Development" is available online.