



Incorporating Community Values into Land Use Decisions



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

What you will learn:

How values guide policy documents

Different engagement techniques

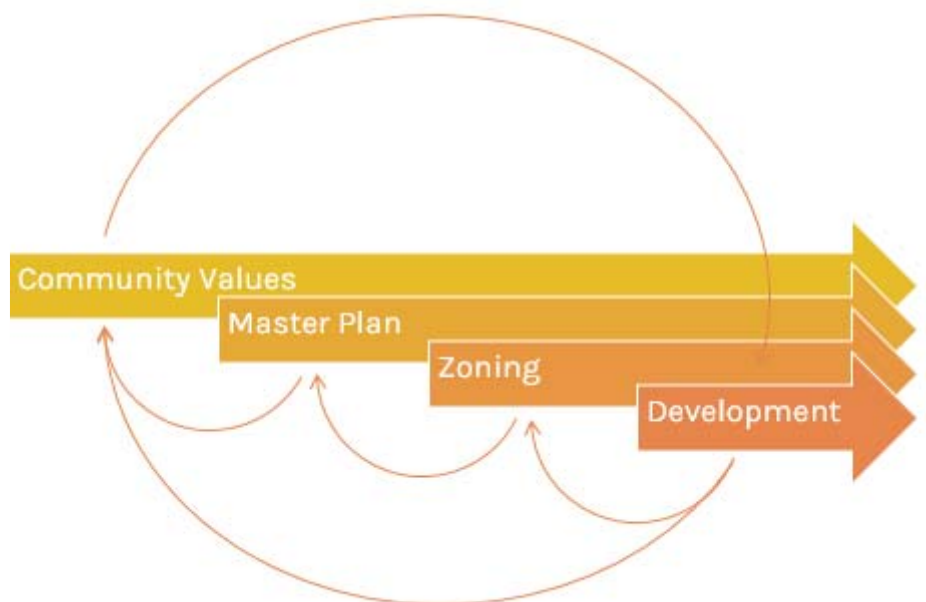
How to brainstorm

Best practices for community engagement

How to incorporate values into everyday work

For municipal staff and leaders, community values should be the foundation of the work you do, the decisions you make, the initiatives you undertake, and the projects you approve. While our community values may not always feel front and center in our day-to-day responsibilities, whenever we are faced with an important or difficult decision, we always come back to them. Our work is easier, more impactful, and more fulfilling when it is aligned with our community values.

When we know what is important and where we are headed, our community conversations are more focused, and the success of our efforts is more effectively measured. A clear why (discovering what really matters) leaves more time for developing the how and when (the goals, objectives and strategies).



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What the Law Says:

Michigan Planning Enabling Act:

Article III, Section 31

(2) In the preparation of a master plan, a planning commission shall do all of the following, as applicable:

- (a) Make careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of present conditions and future growth within the planning jurisdiction with due regard to its relation to neighboring jurisdictions.
- (b) Consult with representatives of adjacent local units of government in respect to their planning so that conflicts in master plans and zoning may be avoided.
- (c) Cooperate with all departments of the state and federal governments, public transportation agencies, and other public agencies concerned with programs for economic, social, and physical development within the planning jurisdiction and seek the maximum coordination of the local unit of government's programs with these agencies.

Who decides what is important?

When it comes to community values, we must seek a broad and diverse set of perspectives. The further we reach, the more perspectives we can incorporate, and the more meaningful our values become. There will always be opposing voices and competing ideas, and that is part of the process. The goal is to develop a set of guiding principles that most of the community can support. The community values are a touchstone. The plans, policies, and regulations provide the tools and structure for how we achieve our vision.

It's all about the process

There are many ways to conduct community visioning and value-setting. You will want to start with a core group of stakeholders and then expand the conversation to the public. Set the context for why you are doing this exercise and how the community will benefit in the future. Begin with broad open-ended questions like: where do we see our community in 20 years? Follow the vision brainstorm with more focused discussion of values and spend some time creating a working definition of the ideas presented. Next is prioritizing the values through voting or consensus. The final value statements may benefit from a set of adjectives, graphics or images, and potentially some tangible examples of implementation strategies, partners, and/or overarching goals. Many people appreciate concrete examples to support their understanding of an abstract idea.

Preparation and outreach are critically important. You don't need to have all the answers before engaging the public. In fact you probably shouldn't come to the public with values preset, unless you are re-evaluating existing community values. What you do need is a roadmap.

Consider the following:

- How long will the process last?
- Are you willing and able to adjust your engagement approach based on public feedback?
- Do you have any community partners or local leaders who can help champion this process?
- Will your engagement be in-person, virtual, or a hybrid?
- Will you offer multiple opportunities and methods for input?
- How will you get the word out to the public? Do you need to provide some additional context with a dedicated website, flyer, or video?
- Do you need to provide a translator? Is the venue easily accessible and welcoming to everyone in your community?
- Who will run the meeting, and is there a designated note-taker? Do you need small group discussion leaders or facilitators?
- What materials will you provide the public before and during the meeting?
- How will you report out the findings of the engagement process?

TERMS:

Vision defines what the community seeks to become in the future.

Values describe the guiding principles and needs of the community that build towards achieving the vision.

Goals can be somewhat abstract and big picture, but they set a wide, overarching target.

Objectives are more specific than goals. Objectives should be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timed.

Desired Outcomes are specific measurable targets connected to metrics or other objective criteria.

Tools & Strategies are specific best practices, approaches, and recommendation that provide the means of reaching desired outcomes.

Actions are the necessary steps that the community or partner can perform within a specific timeframe, utilizing certain resources.

- Who will decide the consensus community values when opinions differ?
- What is the next step?

Planning fatigue is very real. People want to get excited about visioning, but a history of disinvestment or decisions made without engagement can breed mistrust. Be prepared to talk about why this time is different and bring information about your community's resources and tools to make this vision a reality.

Community values exercises are generally positive, future-oriented activities, but this is also an opportunity to talk about fears, uncertainty, and past or current failings. Setting a realistic course to achieve your vision requires first articulating the barriers you face. Language and context matter; your values should be unique to the social, economic, historic, and physical conditions of your community.

Before brainstorming community values, it is helpful to look at the big picture:

Pose open ended questions. Ask people what they value from the present and what they hope for the future. What makes the community unique?

Encourage visualization. Ask attendees to close their eyes and envision the community in 20 or

30 years. What does it look like? When a visitor to the community sends a postcard back home, what is the picture on the front of the postcard?

Develop perspective. Invite attendees to consider the community vision through the day-in-the-life of someone else. Develop a few character profiles based on the demographics of your community.

Community representation is the best-case scenario, but encouraging people to walk in someone else's shoes can be a valuable technique.

Write it, Share it. Most people need time to think, and perhaps to write down their ideas.

Create space for quiet reflection or small group discussion before sharing with the larger group.

This will also help rein in those dominant personalities.

Map it or draw it. Abstract concepts can be challenging for some people. Mapping community assets or drawing pictures to represent a desired future bring another

dimension to the conversation. It is also an excellent way to engage children and young people in the visioning process.

Question negativity rather than shut-it down.

Some people do not want the community to change and that's okay but preserving positive aspects of the community also take effort and intention. Try to tease out what specifically they want to preserve and encourage them to consider

Best Practices for Public Engagement

- Provide information and context to constituents in advance
- A facilitator should set the tone for the meeting. Consider sharing the overview and intent as a video prior to the meeting.
- Invite participants to share their expectations for the meeting or process.
- Document ideas in a way that is visible to the group. Encourage the use of sticky notes, white boards, and chart paper. There are also numerous virtual engagement tools but just remember to consider your audience and accessibility. Always identify a scribe whose only job is to record comments.
- Designate a figurative “parking lot” for extraneous ideas or comments.
- Develop a framework to group ideas into related themes. This may be developed in advance or to summarize the discussion.
- At the end of each session, the facilitator should ensure that everyone is comfortable with the results of the session.
- Provide an online alternative for those who cannot attend in person.

other ideas that would improve the quality of life for everyone in the community.

Building consensus is tricky. While it can be challenging to agree on a common set of values, the collaborative nature of community visioning and goal setting is an iterative process that takes time.

- Strive to balance competing interests, encourage compromises, develop shared priorities, and find a middle ground.
- What values bring together people from all walks of life? What are unifying themes or campaigns?
- Be clear up front about who is shaping the creation of the vision and values – a steering committee, board or commission, neighborhood, or residents. Target different engagement exercises for different audiences.

Value Brainstorming

Once there is consensus around the vision, the community can move on to the values. This may be done in the second part of the first session, or during a second session. The strategies used in the visioning process can also be used to determine community values, but many times these conversations require some additional structure and guidance.

Where to Start:

Vision statement. It is strongly recommended that the actual drafting of the vision statement be done by a small task force or staff group. But you do not want to lose the information and ideas you already gathered.

Were there themes that emerged during the visioning process? Share these ideas as a starting point for the values brainstorm.

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act. State law may provide a helpful launch point for your community values discussion. Consider the people, cultures, neighborhoods, natural systems, and active open space, downtown and corridors, mobility systems, economy, redevelopment, and infrastructure in your community. Consider values that matter for each of these characteristics.

Michigan Association of Planning. The Michigan Association of Planning’s Community Planning Principles define what constitutes quality community planning. It includes General Statements and 46 principles.

Other Resources. It can be helpful to step back and look at existing frameworks from planning theory, research, or other ally disciplines including psychology, environmental science, and public health for inspiration.

Defining Values/ Quality Of Life Metrics:

Pose questions that dig deeper into the vision: *How would you describe your community? What makes your community unique? What does your community prioritize for the future? How would you describe your community in 10 years?*

Resources:

Promoting Health Equity - A Resource to Help Communities Address Social Determinants of Health by the Centers for Disease Control

City Resilience Index

AARP Livable Communities - Information and Inspiration for Local Leaders by AARP

AARP Livability Roadmap to Livability Collection by AARP

“The Just City Index” Just City Lab at Harvard Graduate School of Design

Rural Policy Research Institute

LEED for Cities and Communities by U.S. Green Building Council

Protocol - The New Standard for Community Development by EcoDistricts

The Michigan Association of Planning offers workshops on community engagement and master planning, as well as a mini-workshop on virtual community engagement.

Develop a set of priorities, values, or guiding principles that can be used as metrics to weigh plan recommendations and actions and to track progress during implementation. Some values/guiding principles examples:

Equitable	Resilient
Safe	Innovative
Diverse	Livable
Connected	Preservation
Inclusive	Adaptable
Vibrant	Healthy
Authentic	Accessible
Welcoming	Integrated
Dynamic	Unified
Stable	Affordable

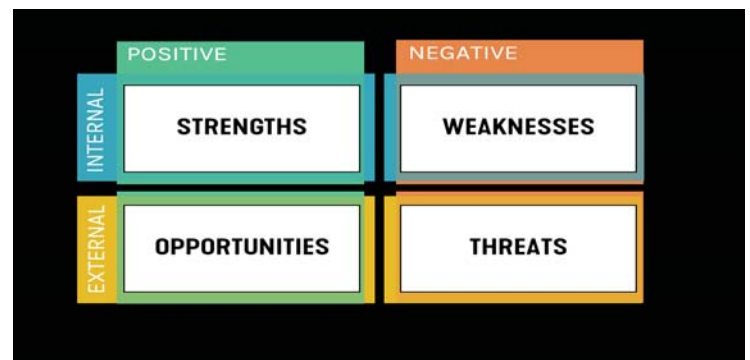
Engagement Activities

You know your community best. The following exercises and frameworks are intended to support you in focusing the conversation and meeting the objectives of your values process.

Think. Share. Sort. Introduce the objective, pose questions, give people time to think and write their ideas on sticky notes. Then come back as a group to share. Sort the ideas in real time and you will see values start to emerge.



S.W.O.T. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (or Challenges). The four-quadrant exercise, or simplified to just “opportunities and challenges” provides a fast way to organize positives and negatives into more proactive ideas that can be built upon or resolved.



Strategies to Manage Planning Fatigue (too many plans or requests for input)

- Reach out to existing neighborhood and community groups.
- Create an action plan for next steps following the vision and values process.
- Let people know about the resources and tools your community plans to use to implement and invite them to join a task force.

Strategies to Gain More Proactive than Reactive Engagement

- Notify local school district, places of worship, service organizations, and businesses before the process begins.
- Be willing to modify your process based on public feedback.

Strategies to Broaden Input beyond the Usual Suspects

- Write a public participation plan with strategies for engaging a wide range of constituents.
- Use a range of outreach methods: social media, flyers, and yard signs.
- Develop a DIY kit for champions to take home to their neighborhoods, organizations, and places of worship.

What's on your radar? Provide some overarching themes or topics and fill out sticky notes, whose placement on the target indicates top priorities.



Rank or Priority Sort. Start with input you received during the visioning session. Are there concepts or values that are more important than others? This exercise can be implemented through an online survey or in-person dot voting or ballot box budgeting.



Weighting. When it comes to values, often there is not a clear order of priority but there are magnitudes of importance. Adding dots to these slider scales can help visualize those values that are more important. This exercise offers a strategy to editing the list of values, but it can also be helpful when thinking about implementation and the goals, objectives, and actions that take precedent in the near term.



Keep. Toss. Create. What are the things you as a community are already doing well? (Keep) What are things that do not serve the larger vision? (Toss) What is missing from the equation? (Create) (This is a more fun version of the typical SWOT)

Goal Setting

Background information and evaluation of trends help identify the vision, issues and values that the plan should address. The vision and the values establish the rationale for the plan goals, objectives, and strategies (including policy and methods). Goals are typically very general statements about the quality and character of the community and must be translated into specific and measurable objectives, which can be prioritized and pursued. Objectives may have a series of specific action steps, or guides for carrying out the goals. These are often the strategies, methods, and policies. Proposed goals and objectives are intended as guidelines for future development policies and decisions, and provide the necessary focus for long-range policies and action programs.

- Set up your goals based on your values/guiding principles so that indicators/metrics can be measured to track progress.
- Consider a community data dashboard to show progress towards reaching your goals.
- Utilize meter graphics to show the benchmark and where the community should invest more time and resources.
- Quantify your ability to achieve goals – what will be costly (in time or money) to implement? What is low hanging fruit?

Incorporating Community Values into Every Day

Once you've done the hard work of establishing consensus around a set of values, you don't want those values to just sit on a shelf. The values should inform most decisions in your community. Consider the following:

- *Setting the legislative body's annual priorities?* Start with the community values.
- *Updating your capital improvement program?* Use your community values as criteria.
- *Writing the planning commission's annual report?* Use your community values as an outline.
- *Preparing for a contentious public meeting?* Open the meeting with the community values.
- *Reviewing a new development proposal?* Consider how it addresses the community values.
- *Updating your master plan?* Start by reviewing the community values.
- *Amending your zoning ordinance?* Think about the relationship between your regulations and community values.
- *Looking for funding to support programming or capital projects?* Consider grant programs and partners that align with your community values.

This tear sheet was developed by the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP) for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). The Michigan Association of Planning is a 501 c 3 organization, dedicated to promoting sound community planning that benefits the residents of Michigan. MAP was established in 1945 to achieve a desired quality of life through comprehensive community planning that includes opportunities for a variety of lifestyles and housing, employment, commercial activities, and cultural and recreational amenities.

