RRC BEST PRACTICE 2: ZONING CODE EXAMPLES

2.2: Accessibility & User-friendliness

A resource for Michigan communities looking to update their zoning ordinance
INTRODUCTION

**Best Practice 2.2:** Enacting zoning regulations that are thorough and legally defensible yet intelligible by planning officials, developers and residents is a big challenge. Fortunately, there are strategies to making zoning ordinances readable, usable and accessible. Strategies such as reorganizing the ordinance so it follows a logical sequence, simplifying standards, removing duplicate and hidden regulations and increasing the use of illustrations can all be used to make zoning ordinances more user-friendly.

While “user-friendliness” is not typically a term associated with legal frameworks such as zoning ordinances, user-friendliness directly increases the ease with which an applicant can find the information they need as they conduct initial research into whether the community is a good fit. A user-friendly zoning ordinance also helps remove a mental barrier to first-time investors who may have never read through a zoning ordinance before.

**HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT**

This document provides examples of how communities have increased the user friendliness of their zoning codes. Please note that zoning codes are highly customized documents designed to advance each community’s vision. Therefore, these zoning code examples should be used to generate ideas only. Any zoning code language adopted locally should undergo a rigorous review to ensure it addresses the community’s specific desires. To learn more about incremental zoning code revisions and related processes check out the “RRC Users’ Guide to Zoning Reform.”

Zoning code updates should always be reflective of goals in your community’s master plan and other relevant plans.
RRC Best Practice 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.

Logical Organization

There is no perfect structure for an ordinance, but one that logically groups sections, chapters and articles can be very helpful. One way to address the issue is by organizing according to the following general sequence:

1) Introduction
2) Regulations that apply everywhere
3) District-specific standards and maps
4) Administration and Procedures

Breckenridge Zoning Ordinance

The village of Breckenridge has a neatly formatted, clickable (hyperlinked) zoning ordinance that is user friendly and can be looked at as an example.

City of Albion Zoning Ordinance

The City of Albion’s Zoning Ordinance contains clear definitions and uses graphics and tables throughout. The ordinance is an interactive format with over 2,800 links in the following locations:

- Main Table of Contents
- Table of Contents in each Article
- Bottom Table of Contents Bar
- Text which references other sections of the ordinance
- Text which references agencies and departments
- Text which references laws in the Albion City Code, State of Michigan and federal.
- Within the zoning map legend
**Marshall Zoning Ordinance**

The City of Marshall’s zoning ordinance utilizes links, graphics, and color coding within the document.

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**West Branch Zoning Ordinance**

West Branch’s zoning ordinance demonstrates great user friendliness as it includes clickable links throughout the document and tables and diagrams simplify zoning concepts for readers.