



# The Annual Joint Meeting



**MICHIGAN ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

## *What you will learn:*

*The purpose of an annual joint meeting*

*Benefits to holding a joint meeting*

Elected and appointed officials are volunteers committed to the betterment of their communities. They already give so much of their time. Can we ask them to have one more meeting? Yes, you should! An annual joint meeting between the planning commission, zoning board of appeals and the elected body (city council, village council or township board) is a great habit to get into.

The legislative body must adopt an annual budget and the capital improvements program. The legislative body also adopts the zoning ordinance and the zoning map. The zoning board of appeals makes decisions on the development that doesn't fit into the existing ordinances. The planning commission and legislative body approve rezonings and zoning ordinance amendments, and the zoning board of appeals can influence the ordinance based on the number of variances they approve.

Each of these groups has a different perspective and a different expertise. Working together, issues can be discussed and resolved efficiently and long term goals reached collectively.

## ***When should we meet?***

Every community should decide what works best. It may make sense to meet after the Planning Commission has prepared its annual report for the legislative body, or while the budget is being prepared, or when the capital improvement plan is being recommended to the legislative body by the planning commission, or before construction season begins. There's no best time; the important thing is to schedule a time to meet and then do it.

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## What the Law Says:

A Planning Commission is required under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act to submit an annual report of the past year's activities. Section 19 (2) A planning commission shall make an annual written report to the legislative body concerning its operations and the status of planning activities, including recommendations regarding actions by the legislative body related to planning and development.

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act also says: To further the desirable future development of the local unit of government under the master plan, a planning commission, after adoption of a master plan, shall annually prepare a capital improvements program of public structures and improvements (Section 65 (1)).

The annual joint meeting may be a chance to come to resolution on issues facing the community or it may be the first step in assigning some concrete tasks for the respective boards to accomplish. Whoever is setting the agenda should determine what the overall goal of the meeting will be.

### WHAT COMMUNITIES ARE DOING THIS?

City of Allegan

Village of Beverly Hills

DeWitt Township

Hamburg Township

City of Manistee

Village of Morrice

City of Wixom

### What should we talk about?

The Planning Commission annual report can provide a framework for the joint meeting's agenda.

**The master plan.** How old is it? When was it last updated? Is your municipality compliant with the 5-Year Review? If the Planning Commission recently reviewed the master plan, what did the Planning Commission learn and decide? Does the master plan adequately express your community's vision for the future, and identify how it plans to get there? Will a master plan update need to be budgeted? Can the update be completed in house or are additional resources necessary to hire a planning consultant?

**Ordinance amendments.** While the zoning board of appeals is not required to make an annual report under state law, it could prepare a report outlining any trends in variance requests. The report could explore the types of variances (for example, rear setback, lot area coverage, use, parking requirements), the number of cases for each type of request, and the outcome of those requests. For example, if there are many requests for setback variances to permit the construction of front porches being heard and those cases are being approved, consider if changing the ordinance is warranted. This meeting is a good time to discuss that idea.

**Development activity.** Are ordinances and policies helping the community reach its master plan goals and objectives? If not, determine how to address inconsistencies.

**The Capital Improvements Plan.** While capital improvements plans (CIP) are required for most municipalities in Michigan, it is surprising how many do not plan for capital investments. If you do not have a CIP, introducing the idea to your community could get the ball rolling to bring you into compliance with the Planning Enabling Act. If you already have a CIP process in place, consider if procedural adjustment would improve the process. MAP recommends that two planning commissioners and one elected official be involved in the development of the CIP from start to finish. Prior to adoption, the legislative body, planning commission and staff can discuss upcoming projects and priorities at this joint meeting. Ultimately, the CIP connects the master plan to the budget, and conversations at a joint meeting can solidify that connection.

If this annual meeting was a first step in a multiple step process (for example, a new zoning ordinance being drafted), then it's important to outline next steps—even if means another meeting (maybe with a sub-committee). If the goal of your annual meeting was to get reacquainted, then no follow up meetings are probably necessary.

Elected and appointed officials are volunteers who already give so much of their time. These tips ensure that the joint meeting can help your community officials increase efficiencies, move forward on policies and practices, and in turn find common ground.

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.

