



Planning and Health



**MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

What you will learn:

What is community health

How land use and zoning affect health

How to develop and implement a master plan that incorporates all aspects of community health

When we hear the word “health”, most of us think of an individual’s physical health. But health is more than that. The World Health Organization defines health as “the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

There are many factors that affect our health, and they are complex and interrelated. In a very general sense, our genes and individual behaviors play important roles, but so does the environment around us.

We are dependent on our environment to support our physical, mental and social well-being. For example:

- Clean air and water
- Places that provide nutritious and affordable food
- Safe transportation routes and modes
- Spaces for exercise and recreation
- Affordable and safe housing
- Places of employment, commerce and education
- Shared public spaces

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Many decisions about land use, development and infrastructure investment are made by local units of government. The consequences of not incorporating health considerations into their planning in a more conscious and evidence-based way can be catastrophic and long-lasting.

What the Law Says:

There are two state laws that authorize local governments to consider health in their land use and development planning:

The **Michigan Planning Enabling Act**, which enables local units of government to establish a planning commission and adopt a master plan for future development. The statute explicitly states that the master plan should guide development that promotes public health, safety and general welfare.

The **Michigan Zoning Enabling Act**, which authorizes the planning commission to develop and administer a zoning ordinance to implement the master plan.

Elected and appointed local officials have an important role in ensuring a healthy environment, as they are tasked by state statutes with protecting the public health, safety and welfare of the community.

A community's master plan can acknowledge the connections between health and the environment and facilitate changes for a healthy community by:

- Increasing awareness by applying a health “lens” to the community’s vision of the future, and
- Guiding zoning and development regulations and municipal policies that support the health of all community members.



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Examples of health priorities found in master plans adopted by U.S. cities and counties include:

- Active living- active transportation, recreation, injury prevention
- Emergency preparedness - climate adaptation, disaster response, infectious disease control
- Environmental health – air and water quality, contaminated land (brownfields), climate mitigation
- Food and nutrition – agriculture preservation, food access
- Social cohesion and mental health – housing quality, green and open space, noise mitigation, public safety, equity, public engagement
- Health and human services – medical, psychological and disability services, aging support

Health Partners for Master Planning

- County public health officials
- Parks and recreation staff
- Local farmers, producers
- Faith-based organizations
- Social service providers
- Adjacent communities
- School health workers and teachers
- Hospitals and clinics
- Environmental organizations
- Housing advocates
- Transportation agencies
- Hard to reach populations

A health-informed master planning process includes the following steps:

Identify Stakeholders

Planners and health practitioners see the links between health and the built environment from different points of view. Both perspectives can yield valuable insights and should be incorporated from the very beginning of the process.

In addition, it's important to identify what individuals and groups have a role in your community's health and who has specific knowledge about the community's health issues.

Build Awareness

Most of us are aware of how individual behaviors like smoking affect health, but it's not as obvious how land use and the built environment may impact us. For instance, the lack of non-motorized facilities links to obesity, and zoning restrictions may present obstacles to urban farmers selling fresh produce. An important step at the beginning of the master plan process is to raise awareness of these connections.

Some ideas to increase awareness include:

- Walking audits to highlight unsafe pedestrian and bicycle facilities
- Farm tours to illustrate the pressures of converting agricultural land to new development, or the challenges in getting farm products to our tables
- Or, a lecture series by local experts, on topics such as barriers to aging in place or protection of the drinking water supply.

Resources:

Plan4Health – a partnership of the American Planning Association (APA) and the American Public Health Association (APHA)

MAP's Planning for Health website

How to Create and Implement Healthy General Plans (ChangeLab Solutions & Raimi + Associates, 2012)

Michigan Association of Planning's Health and Planning Audit Tool.

Engage the Community

Most communities working to incorporate health in their plans form a coalition as a starting point. Other techniques for engaging the community include conducting a survey about community health-related issues or forming committees to explore topics, such as local food systems or Safe Routes to School. Open houses are a useful technique, especially if you hold them in health- or recreation-related locations.

Analyze Health Conditions

Think of this effort as a community “check-up”. The first step in this process is to collect and analyze health data for your community. A good place to start is the county health department’s community health assessment (CHA), which identifies key health needs and issues through systematic, comprehensive data collection and analysis. After completion of a CHA, the health department prepares a community health improvement plan (CHIP), which identifies actions to address the needs identified in the CHA.

Other important data sources include your community’s demographics and their spatial patterns. For instance, can you identify where vulnerable populations like low-income seniors live, or where residents have a high incidence of asthma or obesity? Are there intersections with high pedestrian and bicycle crash rates?

Looking forward, what are the health trends that will

WHAT COMMUNITIES ARE DOING THIS?

City of Holland Master Plan

Livingston County Master Plan

City of Grand Rapids Health Dashboard

Marquette County Rural Climate Health Planning Guidebooks

impact the community in the future? For instance, the growth in the over 80-year-old population without an increase in transportation options may increase social isolation.

Now is the time to develop a list of health issues that could be addressed in your master plan. What health issues can be addressed by changes to the community’s land use and built environment? For example, creating healthy destinations, such as farmers’ markets, can provide access to healthy and affordable food, which in turn can help combat obesity. Protecting natural resources such as aquifers and forested areas sustains air and water quality, which in turn supports human respiratory health and protection from toxins.

Identify Health Goals

Health goals and actions can be incorporated into a chapter in your plan, or the focus on health issues

Example Actions:

- **Active living:** Allow for activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations by revising residential zoning to allow small grocery stores as a special land use.
- **Emergency preparedness:** Identify “cooling” station locations near vulnerable populations for heat emergencies.
- **Environmental health:** Adopt a brownfield redevelopment project review process.
- **Food and nutrition:** Revise use restrictions to allow seasonal farm stands in shopping center or apartment complex parking lots.
- **Health, human and public services:** Revise the zoning ordinance to allow emergency warming shelters in churches for homeless individuals.
- **Social cohesion and mental health:** Support aging in place by revising zoning ordinance to allow for accessory dwelling units by right.

can be woven throughout the plan, in a “health in all policies” approach.

Before jumping to recommendations, it’s important for the community to identify and reach agreement on its values and a future vision. There should be a robust and inclusive community discussion that leads to the development of goals and objectives for the plan.

Create a Healthy Master Plan

Review the existing plan recommendations, policies and codes and reexamine them through a health lens. For example, do the use restrictions in your zoning categories prohibit residential uses in commercial districts?

Allowing a mix of uses increases the opportunities for people to walk or bike between home and stores, office and nearby recreation. A mix of housing types can also support housing affordability, and with it, social well-being.

Implement the Plan

Your master plan will provide a foundation for a healthier community. Consider how to implement the plan’s recommendations. Programmatic and regulatory tools can implement health-related recommendations, such as:

- Zoning regulations – Setback requirements, mixed land uses, floodplain restrictions
- Adopted policies – Complete Streets, parkland minimums, brownfield redevelopment
- Capital Improvements Programming/Budgeting – Sidewalk gaps, street lighting
- Development review standards – Street trees, pedestrian connections, bicycle parking, Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)

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.

