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ZONING QUICK SHEET

BEST PRACTICE 2.2:
Accessibility and User-friendliness

MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Zoning Quick Sheets

Best Practice 2.2 – Accessibility & User-Friendliness

Introduction

What is this Best Practice?

The Best Practices in 2.2 are strategies that communities can use to make sure that their ordinances are readable, usable, and accessible. Zoning Ordinances should be easy to locate online with content that is straightforward to navigate; links from the table of contents, between sections, and in cross-references can help users find information quickly. Ordinances should be concise and succinct with language that does not include discrepancies or leave room for interpretation. Graphics, tables, and charts may be used to better illustrate or clarify difficult concepts or confusing regulations.

Why is this a Best Practice?

Enacting zoning regulations that are thorough and legally defensible yet intelligible by planning officials, developers and residents is a big challenge. Strategies such as reorganizing the ordinance so it follows a logical sequence, simplifying standards, removing duplicate, contradicting, and hidden regulations, and increasing the use of illustrations can all be used to make zoning ordinances more user-friendly. This helps reviewing bodies, including planning commissions and administrative staff. While "user-friendliness" is not typically a term associated with legal frameworks such as zoning ordinances, the 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. In addition, helping residents find answers to their questions not only makes it easier for them to make home improvements or open businesses it can also help them understand the how and why of other development projects.

What are terms to know?

> **Accessible**: In this best practice, we refer to making the ordinance "accessible," which has two levels of meaning. The first is that an ordinance should be easy to find and all in one document. Breaking an ordinance into chapters makes it difficult to navigate and extremely challenging for users with little zoning ordinance experience (like most residents). The second level is about accessibility for those with difficulty reading documents online.

Criteria and Expectations for Essentials and Certified

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 is accessible online.	☐ The ordinance is accessible online.
	☐ The ordinance portrays clear definitions and requirements.
	☐ The ordinance includes graphics, tables or charts.

BP 2.2 Zoning Tool: Accessible Zoning Ordinances

How do communities create an ordinance that is accessible?

Graphics, Tables, or Charts

This best practice recommends the inclusion of graphics, tables, or charts in a community's Zoning Ordinance. Graphics, tables, or charts should enhance the user's experience of the ordinance and provide contextual clarity to definitions or concepts that are difficult to understand; communities should avoid complex graphics, tables, or charts that leave room for interpretation in the ordinance.

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 and Definitions
2. Regulations that apply everywhere
3. District specific standards and maps
4. Administration and procedures

Communities should also use cross-references and links between sections of the ordinance to make it easier for users to quickly gather the information they need.

Electronic Format

At a minimum, an electronic ordinance should be provided on the community's website. This can be as simple as a Word file that is in Portable Document Format (PDF). This makes the ordinance a self-contained electronic document that any computer user can view or print, regardless of the hardware, software, or operating system used to create the original document. Having this document available online means that anyone, anywhere, can find answers to their zoning questions at any time.

Communities should try to create accessible PDF documents that can be read and accessed by people with disabilities, primarily for the vision-impaired that may use assistive technology to read the file through text-to-speech or a Braille printout. A PDF document is considered accessible only if it meets a set of accessibility guidelines. Software maker Adobe has additional information on accessibility on its website: Adobe.com

Application in Communities

(Insert Map)
Name of Community: Clawson, MI
Population: 11,389 (2020 Census)

Description: The City of Clawson is a second-ring suburb of Detroit with a distinguished small-town character and charming central business district. Clawson has many small-lot, single-family residential neighborhoods located within a short walking distance of its major commercial corridors and downtown. Clawson is largely built out and development considerations are generally focused on the redevelopment and reuse of land.

The City of Clawson updated their zoning ordinance in 2022 with new strategies to improve clarity and user-friendliness. The ordinance begins with an informative guide that explains how links, notes, and graphics can be used to locate relevant information. Links are provided throughout the ordinance to connect key pages. On every page, the footer includes navigation links to the table of contents, use matrix, and zoning map, and the side panel has tabs with links to each article; cross-references between sections are also linked together. There are easy to read graphics, charts, and tables to provide clarity and reduce the potential for conflicting interpretations. For each zoning district, the ordinance includes the dimensional standards with a graphic showing how setbacks effect the building envelope and how height should be measured. The city does not use an outside coding company to host its ordinance; it can be found on the city's website here.

(Insert Map)

Name of Community: Albion, MI
Population: 7,700 (2020 Census)
Description: The City of Albion is in Calhoun County in Southwestern Michigan along the I-94 corridor. Albion is home to Albion College and the 1,500+ students who live on its 574-acre campus. In addition to the College Campus, Albion has a diverse population with a broad range of housing types, and recent efforts have been underway to further increase housing diversity. Downtown revitalization is also a key priority for the City, and efforts are underway to make downtown more walkable, reduce blight, and preserve historic buildings.

The City of Albion met this best practice by adopting a zoning ordinance that is logically structured, clear, and directive, with many illustrative graphics and charts. The ordinance uses links throughout the document to make it easy for users to navigate to different standards and cross-reference relevant information. Links to each section of the ordinance are included on the footer of every page, and the beginning of each section includes a table of contents to navigate subsections. The zoning map can also be used to navigate the document, with specific district regulations linked to each zoning district in the legend. In addition to the navigability of the document, Albion's ordinance uses colors, symbols, graphics, and tables to simplify and summarize key information. Zoning district regulations are color coordinated with the zoning district and include a graphic representation of required setbacks. To see Albion's zoning ordinance, click here.

(Insert Map)

Name of Community: Marquette, MI
Population: 20,629 (2020 Census)
Description: The City of Marquette is in Marquette County along the Lake Superior shoreline and is the largest city in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Marquette has a vibrant and walkable traditional downtown with a mix of professional, service-oriented, eclectic shops and restaurants, and recreational opportunities, including its beautiful waterfront. In recent years, Marquette has experienced population growth and a growing population nearing retirement age; with changing preferences for housing, new technologies, and climate change, recent planning efforts have centered on housing, accessibility, and sustainability.

The City of Marquette uses a coding service to provide information in a way that is easy to navigate and understand. The Marquette Ordinance has a table of contents pinned to a sidebar, so users can easily flip between different sections of the ordinance. Definitions are not only provided in a standalone section, words that are defined are highlighted and can be moused-over to provide a pop-up with the definition, this makes it easy for readers to get the information they need contextually without flipping from one section to another. The zoning district information is provided in tables, with dimensional standards clearly

expressed and cross-reference links to the relevant general standards. The Marquette Zoning Ordinance is available [here](#).

Name of Community: Roscommon, Michigan
Population: 981 (2020 Census)
Description: Despite a population of less than 1,000 residents, the Village of Roscommon is the county seat of Roscommon County, a rural northern county in the Upper Peninsula. Roscommon is a quaint and charming village with a downtown area surrounded by Northern Michigan's pastoral beauty. The recent economic development strategy emphasizes goals of permitting new housing types and downtown mixed-use, identifying sites to market for infill opportunities, and continuing to promote the downtown as a destination for tourism year-round.

Roscommon's zoning ordinance uses an accessible and user-friendly format with cross-reference links throughout. The format includes tabs on every page to take the reader between different sections, and the title page of each section includes the contents and links to all the subsections. Roscommon's ordinance also uses some external links to provide additional reference, for example, the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act is linked to the statute so readers can find additional context if needed. In addition to its easy navigation, Roscommon's zoning ordinance includes many graphics to clarify definitions or regulations that may be difficult to understand without a visual reference. Click [here](#) to view Roscommon's zoning ordinance.

To make the ordinance additionally accessible, Roscommon's planning and zoning website has several flow charts to explain administrative processes established in the zoning ordinance, in addition to an easy-to-use guide to development. Click [here](#) to view Roscommon's planning and zoning page.

Name of Community: Hillman, Michigan
Population: 605 (2020 Census)
Description: The Village of Hillman is located primarily in Montmorency County, with a small portion of the Village extending east into neighboring Alpena County. Hillman is a small village surrounded by abundant natural resources, idyllic landscapes, and opportunities for outdoor recreation. In 2021, Hillman adopted a new master plan with policy recommendations to address five main focus areas including community character and quality of life; planning, zoning, and community development; transportation, infrastructure, and public services; natural, cultural, and recreational resources; and housing, with policy recommendations that address development goals as well as goals for improving administrative processes.

The Hillman Zoning Ordinance includes several features to make it easy to use and find relevant information as needed. The table of contents includes links to each section and subsection, and the title page of each section includes links to all subsections. The ordinance includes tabs to navigate from one section to another quickly and easily. Throughout the text, there are tables and graphics to enhance clarity and provide additional context to support the interpretation; in the district regulations, each subsection with regulations specific to a particular zoning district is assigned a color-theme that matches the color of the district on the zoning map. This is also reflected in the permitted use table, which includes a different color for each column to match the district.

Click [here](#) to view Hillman's Zoning Ordinance.