

RRC® WATERFRONT PLANNING TOOLKIT AND GUIDELINES



The purpose of this toolkit is to provide more detail on best planning practices identified in the RRC Best Practice Evaluation Criteria Waterfront-specific Appendix and Training Program case studies presentation. The following topics include recommendations, links, and resources, many of which were identified in case study research and are transferrable to other communities. The case studies were selected to show a broad cross section in terms of community size, location, and water body type.

The RRC Best Practices include an appendix with specific waterfront-related criteria. As a supplement to those criteria, this toolkit includes symbols where applicable tools can help bolster a community's eligibility for meeting the criteria.



Best Practice One: Community Plans and Public Outreach

- 1.1—The Plans
- 1.2—Public Participation



Best Practice Two: Zoning Regulations

- 2.1—Zoning Regulations



Best Practice Three: Development Review Process

- 3.1—Development Review Policy and Procedures
- 3.2—Guide to Development



Best Practice Four: Recruitment and Education

- 4.1—Recruitment and Orientation
- 4.2—Education and Training



Best Practice Five: Redevelopment Ready Sites®

- 5.1—Redevelopment Ready Sites



Best Practice Six: Community Prosperity

- 6.1—Economic Development Strategy
- 6.2—Marketing and Promotion

Waterfront plans may be standalone plans that place particular emphasis on the challenges and recommendations for a community’s waterfront. They may be structured similar to other subarea or neighborhood plans the community has and be adopted as an amendment to the communitywide master plan. Waterfront planning can also be integrated into the master plan process and document itself. In this instance, the master plan should include special attention to waterfront-related development existing conditions, issues, and recommendations.

Inventory and existing conditions

- Include a thorough inventory and description of existing water-dependent businesses, facilities, recreation opportunities, maritime heritage sites, and other coastal- or water-related uses. Determine the vessel draft supported by local docking facilities, watercraft launch sites, and navigation channels
- Document and map waterfront areas that require protection or present development challenges, such as steep sand dunes, rapidly eroding shorelines, areas prone to flooding, high quality natural habitats and scenic views. Certain coastal or shoreline areas are designated for special regulation under Michigan law, including high risk erosion areas (HREAs), environmental areas (EAs), flood risk areas (FRAs), critical dune areas (CDAs), and natural rivers

Land use and redevelopment recommendations

- The waterfront plan should give priority or preference to uses that depend on proximity to the water to be viable, such as tourism-related businesses and compatible waterfront industrial uses.
- Consider a target market analysis to determine which housing types are supportable or needed for the area. New types of housing options may need to be allowed.
- Include input from a Target Market Analysis, retail market strategy by a qualified professional market analysis and/or input from experienced developers to ensure plans realistically tie to local market conditions and demand.
- Consider a form-based approach that gives some flexibility in the uses allowed to respond to market fluctuations if the design meets community standards and outside impacts are addressed.

SAMPLE MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES FROM ST. IGNACE:

- Develop the waterfront in a manner that protects the historic and scenic character of the city.
- Provide additional recreational opportunities for the visitors and residents along the waterfront.
- Make the waterfront more accessible to the public.
- Continue to encourage the maintenance of natural buffers around the shoreline.

Important components to consider when addressing public access include the following:

- Identify links for those arriving in the community from the water, and the facilities/services they need to allow them to visit the downtown, such as docking space for their boats, lockers for canoes and kayaks, bike rentals.
- For those arriving by land, explore whether a visitor can easily find their way to destinations, especially parking. If there is seasonal congestion, look for ways to manage it such as special signal timing, temporary changes to streets, signs to alternate routes, and incentives to park and walk.
- Often one of the most contentious issues to year-round residents is the impact of visitor parking. Strategies to help manage parking near waterfronts may include variable pricing for peak times so that is more costly for locations closer to water and less expensive or free farther away. Where there is a charge for parking, there may be more acceptance if it is noted that a percentage goes to maintain and improve the waterfront area. Rather than parking fines, some communities place a friendly “warning” card that includes a map on where to park in the future. Some communities use off-site parking lots with inviting walkways or shuttles. Wayfinding to help visitors locate parking, especially remote parking, can also help. To incentivize use of remote parking, giveaways could be given such as a discount coupon to a local store or restaurant. Where there are conflicts, a residential parking permit may be needed.
- Identify current public access and how it can be improved through projects and acquisition of easements or land with phasing, as appropriate
- Connect to regional non-motorized trail networks, including “Blueway” trails, or water trails for canoeists and kayakers.
- Maintain or improve linkages between the local or regional land-based transportation system and existing or potential water-based transportation. This might be particularly important in port cities where bulk movement of passengers or goods between land and water is an economic development option.
- Develop a network of pedestrian/bicycle routes linking waterfront resources with other activity centers throughout the community.
- Give pedestrians priority on main routes to and along the waterfront. This may require pedestrian crossing signs that note “yield to pedestrians, minimum \$50 fine,” pedestrian activated traffic signals, or other traffic calming techniques.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PLANS

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The municipal capital improvements program should include criteria giving additional consideration or priority to improvement to infrastructure or public lands that will benefit waterfront related activities, development, or water quality

- Create a checklist for granting project priority:
 - ✓ Does it implement the waterfront plan?
 - ✓ Does it promote new waterfront businesses?
 - ✓ Does it enhance multi-modal waterfront access?
 - ✓ Does it improve water quality?
 - ✓ Does it promote walking or biking and address parking and access?
- Evaluate stormwater runoff conditions and green improvements that may improve water quality such as LID, more green space, special types of vegetation, porous pavement, etc.



- Community engagement techniques are similar to what is outlined for all RRC, but there are some unique groups to target for a waterfront community. Key waterfront stakeholders may include
 - ✓ property and business owners
 - ✓ local boating organizations, including paddling (canoeing, kayaking) groups
 - ✓ marina owners
 - ✓ local harbor master
 - ✓ staff from resource and regulatory agencies (MDNR and MDEQ)
 - ✓ local brownfield authority
 - ✓ disability organizations
 - ✓ watershed council, local recreation organization
 - ✓ tourism boards
 - ✓ chamber of commerce
 - ✓ businesses involved in the travel industry (restaurants or hotels), and local CVB
 - ✓ economic development organizations,
 - ✓ bike advocacy groups and related groups, bike shop owners.
- Incorporate input from the local staff of key resource agencies that can support the plan development and future development, including Sea Grant, the MDEQ, MDNR, and U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, MEDC, and the local area of concern and/or EPA representatives. Certain projects may engage review agencies earlier in the process to identify major or “fatal flaw” issues even though they may choose to wait until the actual permit request to review.

The image and functionality of the community from the water are important, and require a different approach than traditional zoning that is applicable to landlocked parcels. Also, several state laws establish requirements that waterfront development projects must meet to protect water quality and natural resources, and projects that extend into Great Lakes waters are subject to certain federal regulations.

Many communities' regulations treat waterfront lots like any other lot. For example, the zoning front yard is along the street and the rear yard is along the water. But many waterfront lot owners think of the water-side as their front yard, and often the waterfront lots face the front yards of lots across the street. Special zoning standards are suggested to clearly state what is allowed on the water-side and street-side yards. Erosion along the Great Lakes, changes in dunes, seasonal variations in water levels also make effective regulations more complicated.

- View protection:
 - ✓ restrict fence height/placement
 - ✓ restrict location of pools and associated fencing
 - ✓ prohibit accessory buildings in waterfront yards or limit their location
 - ✓ limit placement of landscaping (sometimes included as a clear vision triangle)
 - ✓ average shoreline setback for principal buildings
- Keyhole (flag lot) provisions:
 - ✓ Restrict the ability for keyhole, or waterfront “flag lots” that provide limited, nominal access to the water
 - ✓ Provide a minimum water frontage and depth of parcel
- Waterfront uses:
 - ✓ Specific waterfront-related uses can be identified (marinas, boat clubs, or related recreational uses)
 - ✓ Include provisions for docks, seawalls, piers, ports, lifting devices, etc. (See Grosse Ile’s zoning ordinance’s “Waterfront Provisions” section for a thorough listing of waterfront structures that could be included)
 - ✓ One strategy to encourage “working waterfronts”, as outlined in Frankfort, is to require mixed-uses in their master plans and subsequently in zoning ordinances limit single-family detached uses.
- Natural features setback from shoreline or high water mark.

TIP:

A benefit of mixed-use waterfront planning from Frankfort’s 2010 Master Plan:

“Creates opportunity to add high-value residential units with waterfront views and water access without compromising public views of, or access to, Betsie Bay.”

- Consider potential permitting and environmental restoration requirements. Michigan environmental laws that may apply to development projects in or near the water include:
 - ✓ Part 31, (Water Resources Protection), of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA; Public 451 of 1994, as amended)
 - ✓ Part 91, (Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control), of NREPA
 - ✓ Part 301, (Inland Lakes and Streams), of NREPA
 - ✓ Part 303, (Wetlands Protection), of NREPA
 - ✓ Part 305, (Natural Rivers), of NREPA
 - ✓ Part 323, (Shorelands Protection and Management), of NREPA
 - ✓ Part 325, (Great Lakes Submerged Lands), of NREPA
 - ✓ Part 353, (Sand Dunes Protection and Management), of NREPA
- MDEQ has an environmental permits checklist that lays out what state permits or approvals might be required for various types of development projects, including waterfront projects, and where to go for more info: www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/Permit_Information_Checklist_April_2014_PRINTABLE_454026_7.pdf
- Performance-based development standards that are geared toward protecting water quality.
- Form-based codes can be a useful tool for implementing character-based regulations unique to waterfront districts.

PROCESS, PERMITTING, AND SITE PLAN REVIEW

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Often more outside agency permits are required with waterfront development than with typical development which can complicate the review process.

- Encourage a pre-application meeting to review environmentally sensitive topics and waterfront-related improvements with the appropriate municipal departments and agencies. Give other agencies that will eventually need to issue permits an opportunity for early input to help identify major obstacles. This can help avoid months of local meetings and review only to have the agency deny a permit. This still does not guarantee all the permit requirements will be met but alerting the agency can help reduce the potential for future obstacles.
- Establish a joint site plan team to provide the developer with an overview of the funding and management resources available to public and private entities or partnerships, such as Sea Grant, the GLRI program, boating infrastructure grants, the local area of concern, MEDC, and the local brownfield authority. For example, state grant programs administered by the DNR are listed here: www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-58225---,00.html. Grant and loan programs administered by the DEQ are listed here: www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3307_3515---,00.html. Many of these grant programs are potential sources of funding for certain waterfront development projects.
- Certain Michigan environmental laws provide for local governments to adopt state-approved ordinances, and authorize such communities to issue local permits for development projects in lieu of state-issued permits. These laws include Parts 91, 305, 323, and 353 of NREPA. Waterfront communities interested in streamlining the development permitting process may explore this business-friendly option by contacting the local offices of the state agencies responsible for administering these laws.

Social media

- No longer just a fad, social media is here to stay. A great way to promote events, encourage photo sharing, and word of mouth endorsements, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest are all ways to reach the public. Even if you don't have staff to actively post, simply creating a "location" where people can check-in and an official hashtag solidify your online presence for others to post and share. A recent Pure Michigan Instagram competition asked people to post a photo of their favorite Michigan beach. Build awareness, celebrate your waterfront, and facilitate an online connection between your resource and those that are using it.

Regional partnerships

- Not only is the waterfront a shared asset, but it can be a shared marketing tool for tourism and regional economic development. Several regions throughout Michigan have waterfront-related partnerships:

