



# Board & Commissions Training Strategy

Village of Millington | 2021

Prepared: January 2021  
Redevelopment Ready Communities



## RRC Best Practice 4: Boards & Commissions

Best practice 4 assesses the tools a community has put in place to strengthen their boards and commissions. Diversity on boards and commissions can ensure a wide range of perspectives are considered when making decisions on development and financial incentives. Being intentional when a community conducts recruitment and orientation for newly appointed or elected officials and board members creates a solid foundation for the community to build upon. Additionally, **communities that prioritize training and collaboration provides officials and staff with an opportunity to expand their knowledge and ultimately make more informed decisions about land use and redevelopment issues.**

### Expanding Horizons on Training

Too often, the term ‘training’ is used interchangeably with the concept of going to a formal event put on by someone with experience in a particular field. It is often high level and not always applicable to local communities. This strategy aims to break that mold and expand the toolbox to include not only formal events but also on-site learning, articles, books, mentorship, plan reviews and more. These strategies are based on this expanded definition of training.



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## Introduction

The Village of Millington engaged with the [Redevelopment Ready Communities](#) program in March 2017 to help enhance its local planning, zoning, and development review processes. Since that time, the village has made steady progress toward achieving certification but faces many of the same challenges as other smaller Michigan communities when it comes to training for local officials.

In recognition of the village's self-investment in other RRC Best Practices, RRC staff has dedicated time and resources to providing this training strategy as a direct form of technical assistance to the village. The village incurred no cost for this project aside from a small amount of time to coordinate with RRC staff and asking officials to take a brief survey and review the draft document prior to finalization.

RRC Best Practice Four focuses on building capacity for boards and commissions which make development-related decisions. For Millington this includes:

<b>Council/Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)</b>
<b>Planning Commission</b>
<b>Downtown Development Authority (DDA)</b>

Specifically, this best practice encourages communities to adopt a more **strategic approach** to training to ward off fatigue, apathy, and general time constraints that can hinder delivery of necessary training for board members to stay up to date on the information needed to make informed decisions. As with any strategic document, it establishes high level goals which are realized via the specific training strategies for each board:

**Goal 1:** Expand the Village's toolbox of training to include new methods and resources.

**Goal 2:** Meet the established annual training hours goal for each board.

**Goal 3:** Tie training activity to established local goals and needs.

### Customized for Millington & Tailored for Small Communities

The strategy was built specifically with Millington in mind. The average size of an RRC community is under 4,000 residents which allows RRC to both understand the capacity of smaller communities and to also have a wide perspective on what is possible when communities take a strategic approach with set goals and frameworks which can expand a community's capacity. The village is always welcomed to alter this strategy if it determines the current structure does not work for Millington after a year.

### Using this strategy

The outcome of this project is a series of recommendations to help the village more strategically approach training based on data, existing goals, and available resources. While the strategy does not get into a level of detail that suggests specific events or month-by-month schedule, it does provide a framework which will help village officials and staff identify priority training activities that will best help it further its established goals. Specifically, this strategy should be referred to when:

<b>1</b>	Scheduling at-meeting training
<b>2</b>	Considering financial support requests to attend training/events
<b>3</b>	Deciding whether to forward training information received from various agencies
<b>4</b>	Reviewing progress and making updates

It is also important to note that the exclusion of a topic or training method does not mean the village should reject other opportunities when they fit the overall goals of the village. But this strategy does aim to identify what is most helpful and fits within the capacity determined from the existing conditions survey.

At the end of 2021, the village should review the strategy and identify what worked, what did not and what could change. The strategies for each board could then be updated for the following year. The framework on page 4 includes questions to consider during that annual update.

## Existing Conditions Survey

As part of this strategic, local officials took a brief online survey to help RRC better understand their experience, desires for serving, understanding of core topics, interest in additional topics, and constraints to getting training. Full results are found in Appendix A. RRC does not anticipate that the village will need to conduct a survey each year, but every 3-4 years would be prudent, depending on turnover.

## Existing Plans & Goals

Millington has three main plans which currently provide guidance on the village's goals. These are:

- [Master Plan](#) (2012, with a recent update nearly complete)
- [Downtown TIF Plan](#) (2003 – 2023)
- [Economic Development Strategy](#) (2020)

Where appropriate, these training strategies pull from upcoming planned actions or goals to help the village prepare to complete those. For example, the DDA's plan recommends a training in 2021 around emerging DDA trends in planning to help the village prepare for an update in 2022 or 2023. The master plan goals from the nearly completed update are used instead of the 2012 goals based on indications that they don't expect to change between now and adoption.

## Training Framework

While most attention around training often goes to actual training events, a successful training strategy not only recommends specific training events but also establishes a culture that encourages ongoing training and information sharing. Under RRC Best Practice Four, this includes several aspects such as identifying training funds, consistently encouraging training and more. This section makes several recommendations for an updated training framework in Millington which aligns with Best Practice Four and more efficiently uses officials' limited time while adding a level of accountability.

### Expanding the Training Toolbox



Too often, the term 'training' is used interchangeably with the concept of going to a formal event put on by someone with experience in a particular field. It is often high level and not always applicable to local communities. This strategy aims to break that mold and expand the toolbox to include not only formal events but also on-site learning, articles, books, mentorship, plan reviews and more. These strategies are based on this expanded definition of training.



## Funding Training

There is no specific amount of training money which needs to be set, but the village should continue to budget for some level of training each year for staff and officials as a **dedicated line item(s)**. Ideally the village will assess its training needs at the beginning of each year and budget as close to those needs as possible. The village should also explore other funding methods including:

Scholarships	Training scholarships from organizations such as MML or MAP; these are commonly event specific.
Insurance Funds	Training funding through the village's insurance company; some offer funds to encourage training and therefore reduce their risk exposure.
Pooling Resources	Pooling resources with nearby communities to pay for training; this can often bring additional partners to the table too.
State Support	Working with state level partners such as RRC to potentially pay for training

## Training Records

The Village Clerk has established an **Excel spreadsheet** to track training activity for staff and officials though that was housed directly within the previous training strategy. This sheet should be updated at each meeting and reviewed annually when the village is assessing training needs for the upcoming year. Based on the recommendations in these strategies, the village should be sure to capture outside training activity as well.

## Consistent Encouragement and Reminders

As part of its RRC efforts, the village added **training as a standing agenda topic** for all its boards and commission. This encourages consistent reminders about upcoming trainings and report outs from recent training events. This practice should continue.

## Establishing Annual Training Targets

RRC encourages the village to **establish annual training targets** for members. Doing this in the form of hours allows the village to measure progress but also affords flexibility to members to meet those goals in whatever way is easiest for them. Based on feedback from the survey, RRC recommends the following targets for 2021 (note: many members thought more were needed so future increases should be considered):

Council/ZBA	8 hours annually
Planning Commission	8 hours annually
Downtown Development Authority	4 hours annually

RRC encourages the village to incorporate these training targets into bylaws for each board. This adds a level of accountability. Given this is the village's first year under this plan, it may make sense to see how they work for a year and then incorporate them into formal bylaws in 2022.

## Annual Joint Training

The village should continue its tradition of holding at least one **joint meeting a year** (commonly around January) on a topic(s) of common interest to officials. For 2021, the meeting will focus on various topics

such as economic development strategy, priority sites, and this training strategy. In future years, it could incorporate a formal training component to help members reach their training goals together.

### Organizational Memberships

Millington currently holds organizational members with the [Michigan Municipal League](#) (MML) and is active with local Councils of Governments. Such organizations offer training material either for free or at a reduced cost to members. Officials should make themselves aware of these resources and use them as much as possible.

### Annual Update

Training priorities will likely shift from year to year depending on emerging trends and the community's planning goals. As such, this document should be reviewed each year and adjusted for the upcoming year. The following steps should be taken:



STEP	DETAILS	TIMING
<b>Update Records</b>	Ensure that training activity records are up to date.	Late October
<b>Analyze Results</b>	Analyze the records to determine if goals were met for the year.	Early November
<b>Assess Outcomes</b>	Review the outcomes. If goals were not met, why? Compare against priority topics and identify ones that have been met or new ones that should be added.	November meetings
<b>Update Strategy</b>	Update the strategy document	Early December
<b>Review</b>	Officials review document, make any needed edits	December meetings
<b>Distribution</b>	Final version distributed	End of Year

## Implementing Year 1

The key to any successful strategy is implementation. The village should use the list below to ensure all aspects of this strategy are addressed in 2021:

Task	When	Complete?
Make any needed updates to the training activity tracker	Q1 2021	
Schedule any joint training(s) for 2021	Q1 2021	
Schedule at least two formal at-meeting trainings for 2021	Q2 2021	
Inquire if the village's insurance company provides training funds	Q1 2021	
Conduct annual review & update	Q4 2021	
Update bylaws to include training expectations	Q4 2021	

## 2021 Training Strategies

This section contains training recommendations for each board for 2021 based on the results of the survey, plan goals, available resources and known training availability. These are meant to be fluid strategies but should be used to assess any training funds requested by individuals to ensure those funds are being used to meet established goals. **These strategies do not include any major conferences or off-site events**, a nod to the time and cost concerns identified in the 2020 survey.

These strategies are not intended to be restrictive but identify priorities. Officials should feel welcome to attend training outside of these topics and methods when time permits.

### Planning Commission

The Planning Commission plays a major role in the village's development process by overseeing the master plan process, drafting zoning changes, and reviewing site plans. Planning Commissioners make legally binding decisions that can have impacts on the physical development of the community for years (and decades) to come. The Planning Commission meets once a month in the evening.

2020 survey results showed the Planning Commission's preferred methods of training to be at-meeting & reviewing plans (both were tied), and online training (tied for third). There were also some clear priorities from the specialize topics interest portion. Keeping survey results in mind, this plan recommends the following training approach for 2021:

<b>Annual Goal</b>	8 Hours		
<b>Delivery Methods</b>	Joint Meeting (1 hour); At-meeting training (2 hours); personal preference (5 hours)		
<b>Priority Topic</b>	<b>Identified via</b>	<b>Other boards</b>	<b>Potential Delivery Methods/Resources</b>
Municipal Financial Sustainability	2020 Survey	Council, DDA	Michigan Department of Treasury <a href="#">Fiscally Ready Communities</a> program (format for 2021 TBD); joint budget workshop with Council
Redevelopment-specific Tools	2020 Survey, ED Strategy	Council, DDA	<a href="#">MEDC MiPlace</a> , <a href="#">EGLE Brownfields Program</a> (could use online resources or speakers)
Historic Preservation	2020 Survey & Master Plan Goals	DDA	<a href="#">Michigan Historic Preservation Network</a> events or conference, <a href="#">State Historic Preservation Office</a> (SHPO) resources
Public Engagement Strategies	2020 Survey	Council	Review existing public participation plan, <a href="#">MetroQuest</a> webinars
Spot Zoning	Master Plan Goals		MSU Extension: Spot Zoning <a href="#">article</a> , inviting in a zoning professional
<b>Other resources for the Planning Commission</b>	Millington Master Plan, Millington Downtown Plan, <a href="#">CityLab</a> , <a href="#">Planetizen</a> , <a href="#">Strong Towns</a> , <a href="#">880 Cities</a>		



## Village Council/ZBA

Village Council is responsible for several aspects of the development experience: approving the master plan and zoning ordinance, amendment the zoning ordinance (including rezoning), approving the use of economic development incentives (when applicable), and ensuring essential services are provided via in-house staff or contractors. Council also serves as the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). The Village Council meets once a month in the evening. This plan assumes it typically has a full agenda already. Council also

Preferred methods of training were at-meetings (#1), followed by reviewing local plans and ordinances and tours (tied for #2). Webinars came in at a close third. There were also some clear priorities from the specialize topics interest portion.

<b>Annual Goal</b>	8 Hours		
<b>Delivery Methods</b>	Joint Meeting (1 hour); ZBA annual meeting (1 hour); At-meeting training (2 hour, likely split into smaller 15- or 30-minute sessions over the year); personal preference (4 hours)		
<b>Priority Topic</b>	<b>Identified via</b>	<b>Other Boards</b>	<b>Potential Delivery Methods/Resources</b>
Municipal Financial Sustainability	2020 Survey	PC, DDA	Michigan Department of Treasury <a href="#">Fiscally Ready Communities</a> program (format for 2021 TBD); joint budget workshop with PC and DDA
Redevelopment-specific Tools	2020 Survey, ED Strategy	PC, DDA	<a href="#">MEDC MiPlace</a> , <a href="#">EGLE Brownfields Program</a> (could use online resources or speakers); could tour a nearby MEDC-supported project
Public Engagement Strategies	2020 Survey	PC	Review existing public participation plan, <a href="#">MetroQuest</a> webinars, “ <a href="#">Power of Public Engagement</a> ” webinar series recordings from MSU Extension
ZBA Responsibilities	Role		In-person meeting focused on reviewing ZBA basics, court rulings of note, recent variances, and general resources. <a href="#">MAP</a> also offers a ZBA workshop that could be good practice.
Local Plans and Ordinance Reviews	2020 Survey		Millington Master Plan, Downtown Plan, Economic Development Strategy, Zoning Ordinance, etc. Could be a joint meeting, independent study, etc.
Other resources for the Village Council	<a href="#">National League of Cities</a> , <a href="#">AARP Livable Communities Initiative</a>		

## Downtown Development Authority

The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) in Millington is responsible for implementing the DDA Development and TIF plan as well as the 2015 Downtown Strategy. While the DDA does not have direct authority for zoning or development incentives, its efforts to promote downtown as a community gathering spot and economic engine are essential to fostering a high quality of life in Millington which in-and-of-itself is an essential part of any economic development strategy.

DDA training method priorities were no surprise compared to other board with at-meetings and webinars coming in at the top, followed by news articles and online courses (tied). Some priority topics also emerged including learning more about municipal financial sustainability. The master plan's goal of addressing historic preservation is also something the DDA will likely need to take part in. Training goals for the DDA is less than others based on feedback.

<b>Annual Goal</b>	4 Hours		
<b>Delivery Methods</b>	Joint Meeting (1 hour); At-meeting (2 hours); Personal preference (1 hours)		
<b>Priority Topic</b>	<b>Identified via</b>	<b>Other boards</b>	<b>Potential Delivery Methods/Resources</b>
Municipal Financial Sustainability	2020 Survey	Council, PC	Michigan Department of Treasury <a href="#">Fiscally Ready Communities</a> program (format for 2021 TBD); joint budget workshop with Council
Redevelopment-specific Tools	2020 Survey, ED Strategy	Council, PC	<a href="#">MEDC MiPlace</a> , <a href="#">EGLE Brownfields Program</a> (could use online resources or speakers)
Historic Preservation	2020 Survey & Master Plan Goals	PC	<a href="#">Michigan Historic Preservation Network</a> events or conference, <a href="#">State Historic Preservation Office</a> (SHPO) resources
Tourism	2020 Survey		MSU Extension's " <a href="#">Understanding Tourism</a> " presentation, " <a href="#">Tourism – The community is the product</a> " article series from MSU, invite local CV or EDO's to come speak on the topic; visit local tourism-based communities to meet with their DDA (or joint Zoom meeting).
Downtown Planning	DDA Plan		Inviting either a selected consultant the DDA plan update (if in place) or MEDC to come speak about downtown development and the planning process.
Other resources for the DDA	Michigan Downtown Association (MDA), <a href="#">AARP Livable Communities Initiative</a>		

## Training Log

This example training log has been provided as an alternative just in case the village would like to update its existing method. It is by no means required. It is designed to help the village capture key information to help it make informed decisions based on this data at the end of the year.

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## Appendix: Survey Results (December 2020)

The following is a summary of an online survey emailed to all board and commission officials in Millington.

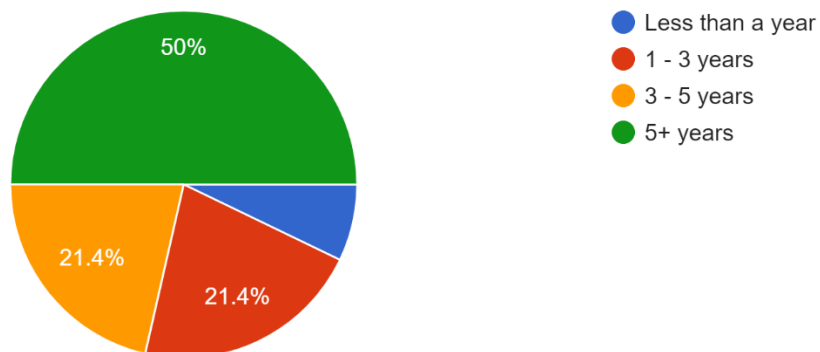
In total there were XX officials at the time and 14 responded to the survey (XX% response rate). All three boards were well represented in the survey with five (5) on Council/ZBA, seven (7) on the Planning Commission and five (5) on DDA. Several respondents serve on more than one board.

### Experience

**Over 70% of respondents indicated they have 3 or more years of experience** serving on a board in the village; half had more than five years. This puts the village in a strong position to focus on more specialized training topic areas aligned with its long-term goals. This stability is further confirmed in a future section where the village shows a high level of comfort with many of the core topics like meeting norms and public speaking.

How long have you served on a government board/commission in the community?

14 responses



### Why You Serve

When asked why a respondent choose to service on a government board/commission, one common theme emerged: service to the community. This tracks well with RRC's experience working with the village and its positive attitude and outgoing nature. One respondent indicated they were asked to serve after attending a meeting – providing that asking never hurts.

The list below includes all answers to this question (some minor edits have been made for typos and formatting purposes).

- I believe in public service
- Was asked to attend a meeting, and enjoyed it so I joined
- To help improve our community.
- Service to the Village of Millington

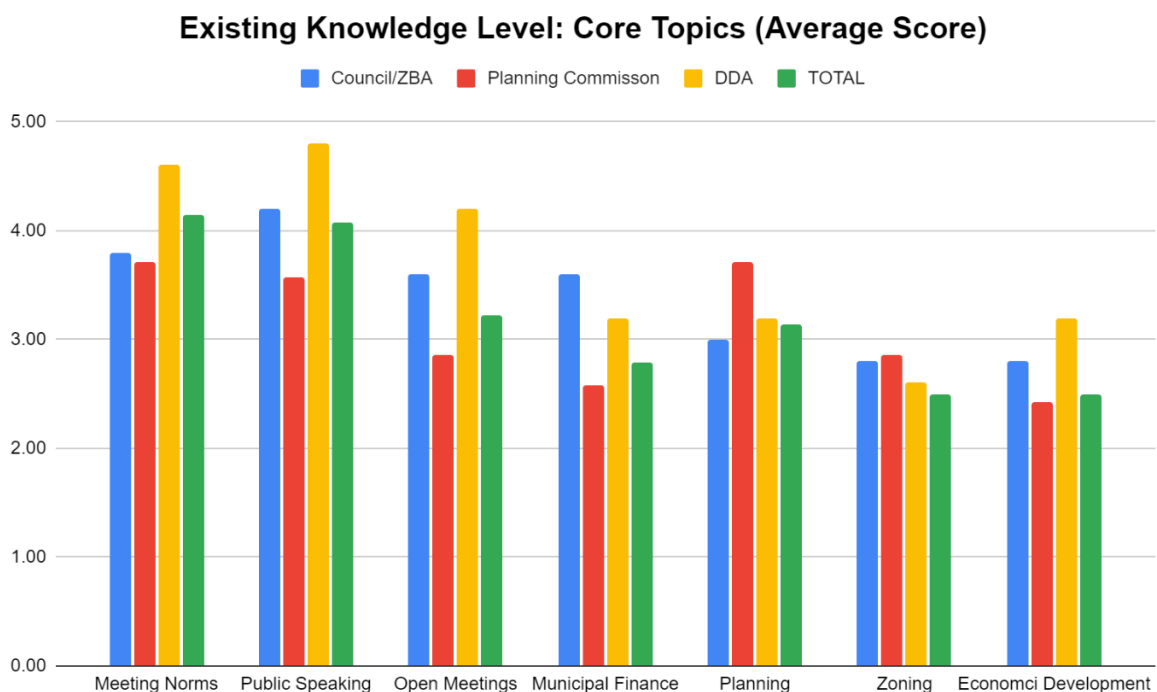
- To help better our community
- To get involved in the community
- Service to community
- Got interested in helping local government in 1992
- To gain knowledge
- To assist my community to move forward in development and safety.
- To be more involved in my community.
- To serve our community in whatever means it needs
- To get involved in the community

### Familiarity with Core Topics

The next question asked respondents about their familiarity with some core topics that commonly come up for municipal officials. Respondents rated their comfort level on a scale of 1 – 5 with 1 being “completely unfamiliar”, 3 being “some training but limited” and 5 being “very familiar”.

**As mentioned earlier, Millington is fortunate to have many longstanding local officials who already feel comfortable with many of these core topics.** Meeting norms (4.14) was the highest, with public speaking not far behind (4.07). More specialized topics like planning (3.14), zoning (2.50), and economic development (2.50) were the lowest ranked and could be candidates for additional training, especially for boards outside the Planning Commission. **Municipal finance (2.79) also demonstrated drop in confidence compared to earlier topics** – that topic also shows up high on the list of optional training topics later in the survey. Open meetings can in around the middle (3.21) and could be worth a refresher in the age of virtual meetings and services, but it is likely not a high priority based on these results.

The chart on the next page shows the comfort level by board and then compared to overall (green).



## Past Formal Training Activity

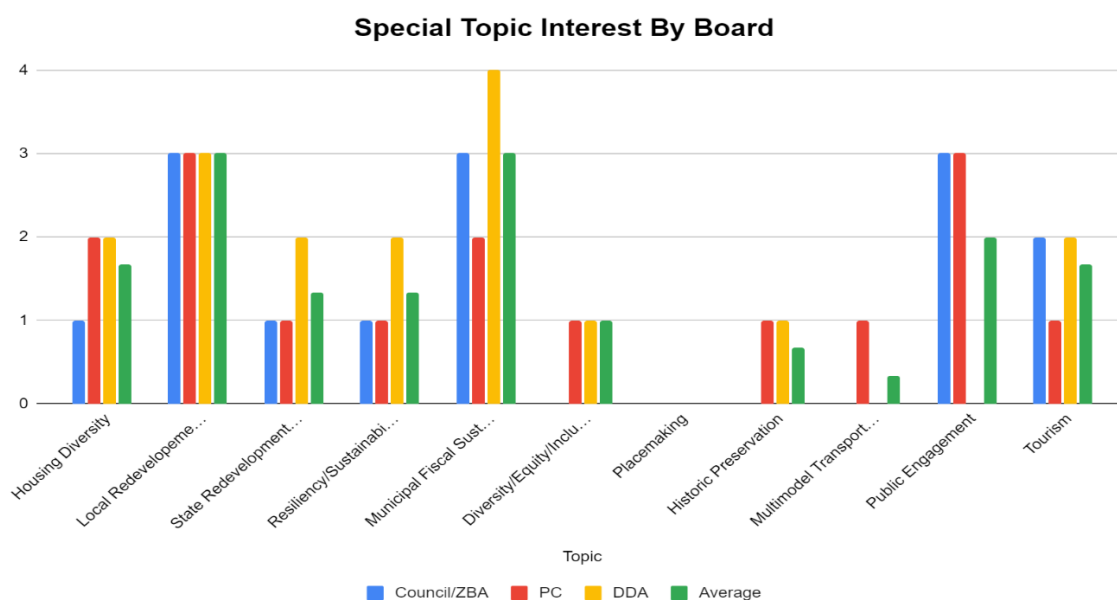
The survey also attempted to get an idea of what training events or resources officials had attended in the past and which organization they belonged to. Most respondents indicated they had not attended any of the events and did not belong to any of the organized. Of those that did answer, the responses indicated that one person belonged to both MML and MEDA; they had also attended an MML convention in the past and one person belonged to the MML but had not attended any events.

## Reviewing Local Plans

Because the community is engaged in the Redevelopment Ready Communities process, this survey included a question regarding which plans have been referenced in the past year to make decisions. The RRC Best Practices call for communities to be continually opening and assessing their plans; reviewing plans is also a great, locally focused, and free training opportunity. **The master plan was the most cited (9 responses), likely due to the village's efforts over the past year to update the document.** The Downtown Plan coming showed up in four responses (again, spread over all three boards thanks to cross-board membership) and the Parks/Recreation plan once (Council). Two respondents indicated they had not reviewed any of the village's plans in the past year and one indicated the master plan had been used in the past but not recently.

## Interest in Specialized Topics

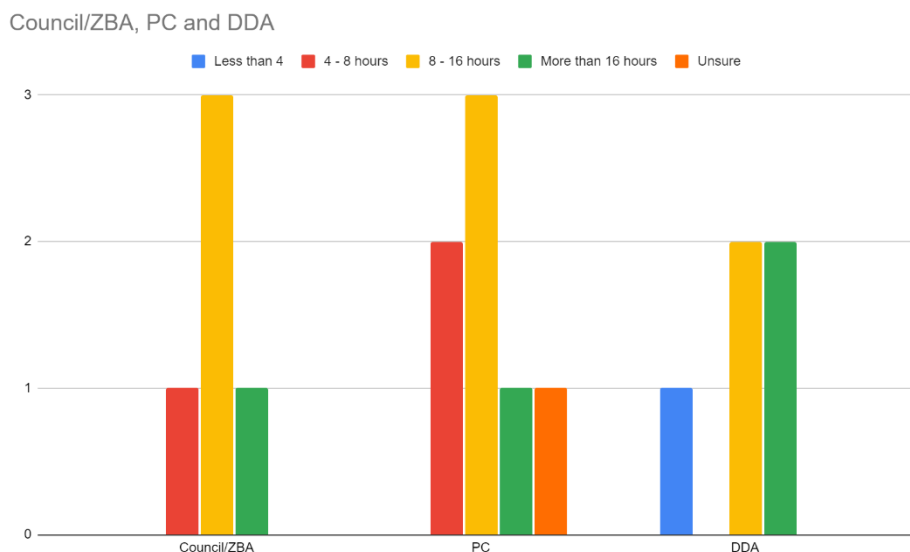
In addition to plans, the survey provided a range of potential topics for training and asked participants which they might be interested in receiving more information on. Two clear priorities emerged for all three boards: **local redevelopment tools and municipal fiscal sustainability**. These could be great topics for joint trainings. Council and Planning Commission also showed a significant interest in public engagement. The village adopted a [public participation plan](#) in 2019; reviewing that could be a good start to determining how to proceed. Some topics showed little interest including placemaking (no responses) and multimodal transportation (complete streets).





## Perceived Training Needs

The next question asked respondents to estimate the amount of time per year they think ideally is needed for training to stay informed. **Overall, the 8 – 16 hours option emerged as the clear majority** with some variation by board, mainly the DDA where it tied with 16+ hours. This information will be used in the training strategy to set formal annual targets to encourage ongoing training.



In addition to topics, respondents were asked about their preferences for how training is delivered. RRC encourages communities to think outside the box when it comes to delivery – training is not only done by professionals at formal events hours away at big conferences. The top three preferred delivery methods were:

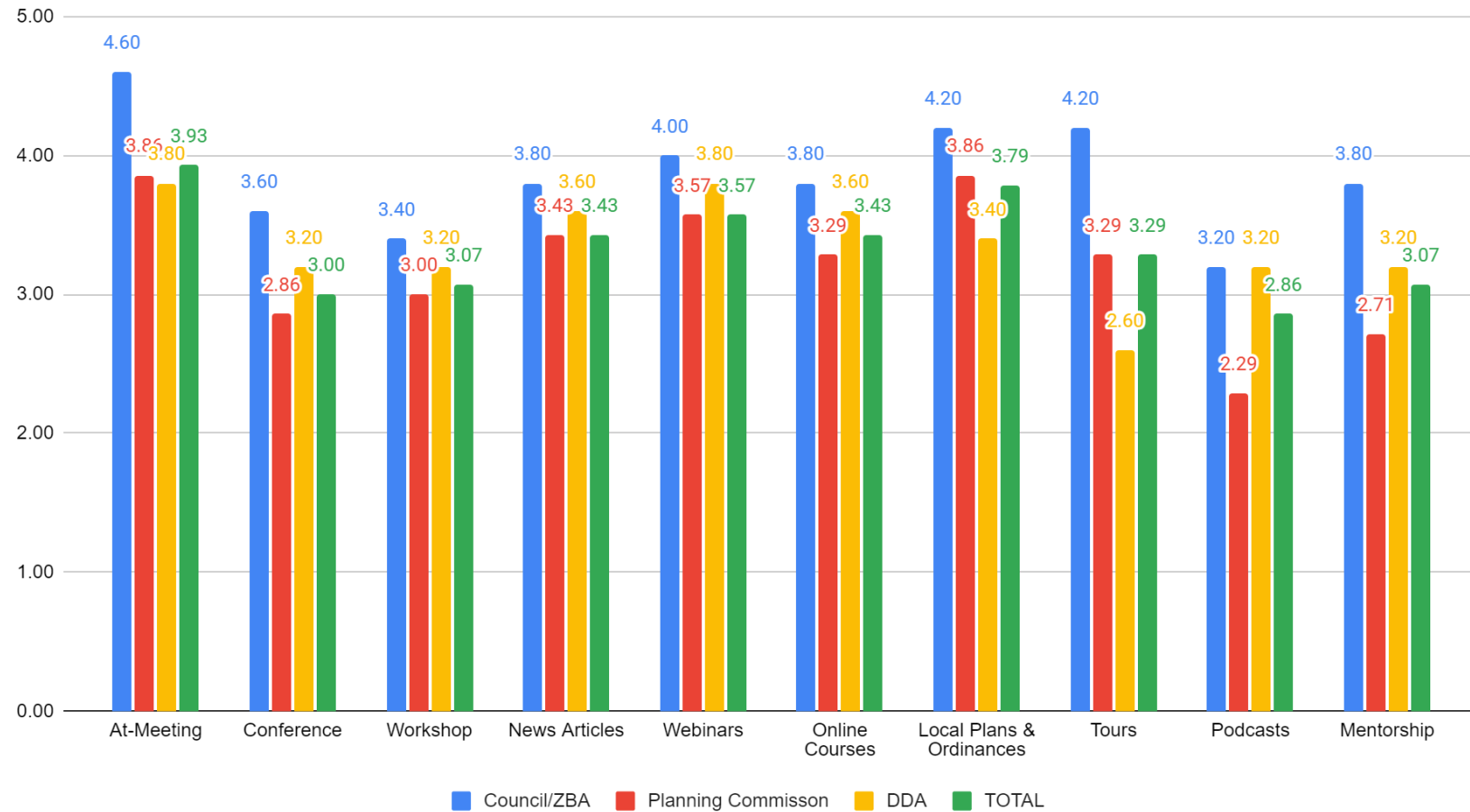
1. At-meeting training (average 3.93 out of 5)
2. Reviewing local plans and ordinances (average 3.79 out of 5)
3. Webinars (live or recorded) (average 3.47 out of 5)

News articles and online courses (multi-session, part of a curriculum) tied for 4<sup>th</sup> place with an average of 3.43 each. Podcasts came in last at 2.86 with others like conferences and mentorship in between.

There were some variations in preference by board. For example, the DDA demonstrated notably less interest in tours of other communities. This is likely due to time constraints of running a business that other officials may not experience. Council, on the other hand, appears very open to the idea. These differences will be reflected in the training strategies.

The graph on the next page shows the data for preferences, averaged overall and by each board.

## Training Delivery Preferences By Board (Averages)



## Constraints to Receiving Training

Finally, the survey asked about constraints/challenges to training. There were no big surprises here – time and cost were the major factors. Taking a more strategic approach to training should address both concerns. One member also mentioned health issues which the village should of course consider in establishing training expectations as appropriate.

