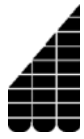


# RESEARCH REPORT



Michigan Agricultural  
Experiment Station  
Michigan State University

## Expanding Education and Training Opportunities for Michigan Local Government Land Use Planning Officials





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# Introduction

Land use decision makers are becoming involved in increasingly complex issues. Indeed, the dynamics of land use have been changing rapidly and dramatically. As development has moved into rural and suburban areas, many communities have found themselves ill-equipped to deal with the new growth. Unfortunately, poor or ill-informed decisions can result in long-lasting and even irreversible consequences. All too often, land use decision makers are citizen planning officials with little or no training and education to assist them in their public roles.

Planning commission and zoning board of appeals members are usually interested citizens concerned about the future of their communities. As planning officials, they are charged with making decisions that will ultimately guide the economic and physical development of their communities. Sprawl development, congestion, growth management, and inner-city decay are but a few of the complex issues they face. Some communities, particularly larger cities or towns, have full-time planning staffs, but many do not have this support. Without professional planning assistance, the responsibility for planning and zoning falls solely upon commission and board members.

In Michigan, land use planning and decision making are particularly complex. Most of the state's planning and zoning acts were adopted before 1945 and have not been changed substantially since, despite significant technological advancements and population growth.<sup>1</sup> These statutes give authority to 1,857 local governments (counties, townships, cities, and villages) to make

independent planning and zoning decisions. This makes coordination and consistency in planning and zoning across Michigan communities very difficult. Equally troubling is evidence that many public officials do not know who is in charge of planning or zoning or whether their community is zoned (McGrain and Baumer, 2004).

Education and training for Michigan's planning and zoning officials is a clear need. The large number of planning officials and the lack of coordination between jurisdictions on planning and zoning efforts underscore this need. Additionally, planning officials' time in office is rather short. The Michigan statutes specify 3 years as the term of office for an appointed planning commission member, but a 1996 study found that, among planning commission members surveyed, the average number of years served was fewer than 6 and the mode (most frequent response) was just 2 years (Wiesing, 1996). Ongoing access to education and training opportunities for Michigan's planning officials will be required to meet their educational needs. This bulletin reviews the statutory process for land use decision making in Michigan, the kinds of educational programs currently available for planning officials, and the extent to which planning officials are participating in these opportunities. The potential for expanding the reach of educational programming for planning officials - especially using online programs - is considered, and results of a study conducted to investigate this potential are presented.

## Land Use Decision Making in Michigan

Land use planning is the method by which communities can manage and guide their future development. The American Planning Association (2005) describes the goal of city and regional planning as furthering the "welfare of people and their communities by creating convenient, equitable, healthful, efficient, and attractive environments for present and future generations." Planning helps to ensure orderly growth and development for a community in an efficient manner that minimizes wasteful expenditures and reduces poor land use decisions. Simply put, land use planning allows a community to have a say in the way it is developed.

In Michigan, planning commissions are advisory bodies charged with making and adopting a comprehensive plan, developing and recommending zoning, and reviewing and/or approving new development

(Heidemann, 1997). Planning commissions, made up of individuals appointed by the local legislative body (township board, city council, village council, or county board of commissioners), advise and give guidance on land use within the community.<sup>2</sup>

Heidemann (1997) refers to planning commissions as "think tanks" that develop new and creative ideas for the community. Developing and carrying out the comprehensive or "master" plan is the principal responsibility of planning commissions. The comprehensive plan provides a frame of reference for the planning commission and is "a tangible representation of what a community wants to be in the future" (Kelly and Becker, 2000). Included within the comprehensive plan should be all the land area subject to the planning jurisdiction and all subject matter related to the physical development of the community.

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<sup>1</sup>As this publication goes to press, both houses of Michigan's legislature have passed a new zoning enabling act that replaces the three original zoning enabling acts. The governor is expected to sign the new act into law.

<sup>2</sup>The Michigan Township Zoning Act authorizes zoning boards, which function much like planning commissions but focus exclusively on zoning matters rather than long-range community planning. Some communities continue to use this structure, although it is now the exception rather than the rule. Thus, for our purposes here, the discussion will focus on planning commissions.

The comprehensive plan should have a time horizon of approximately 20 years to account for change and development within the community, although Michigan law requires that comprehensive plans be reviewed every five years.

Michigan’s planning enabling statutes permit but do not require planning for Michigan’s local jurisdictions. If a community chooses to undertake planning, the planning enabling acts require the planning commission to prepare and adopt a local comprehensive plan and to review proposed subdivisions of land and public works projects (Wyckoff, 1985.) Also, Michigan’s zoning enabling laws specify that zoning shall be based on a plan.

Zoning is not separate or distinct from planning. Rather, zoning is an integral part of the land use planning and decision-making process. Planning is the process by which a community determines its ideal development pattern; zoning is the process by which the development pattern is realized. Fischel (1985) defines zoning as “the division of a community into districts or zones in which certain activities are prohibited and others are permitted.” The zoning ordinance then specifies the uses that are permitted and the conditions placed on those uses within each zone.

Planning commissions work in collaboration with zoning boards of appeals and legislative bodies to implement zoning. Michigan’s zoning enabling statutes specify that a zoning board of appeals (ZBA) shall be established in each community that exercises the authority of zoning. The purpose of the ZBA is to hear and decide questions that arise in the administration of the zoning ordinance, including the interpretation of the zoning map. The primary role of the ZBA is to enforce the provisions of the zoning ordinance. The ZBA fulfills its purpose when it hears an appeal, when it is asked for an interpretation, and when it is asked for a variance. The roles and responsibilities of the ZBA may differ by the type and size of the community, but the core

functions include appeals of administrative decisions, variances (use and non-use), temporary uses, and ordinance interpretation (text and map).

The roles of and relationship between planning commission, elected body, and zoning board of appeals are similar to the separation of powers and checks and balances found in our federal and state governments. Though the planning commission makes zoning recommendations and can approve some development proposals, the elected body is exclusively charged with adopting and amending the zoning ordinance. The ZBA serves as the quasi-judicial body to hear and decide appeals on these decisions and make interpretations of the zoning ordinance. When considering a variance, the ZBA decides whether to waive or modify specific requirements of the zoning ordinance on the grounds that the ordinance creates a practical difficulty (non-use variance) or unnecessary hardship (use variance) for the applicant because of unique circumstances related to the property.

Planning and zoning are authorized for cities and villages, townships, and counties in separate statutes.<sup>3</sup> There are similarities as well as distinct differences between the procedures authorized for the various units of local government. As one example, the number of members authorized to serve on city and village planning commissions differs from the number authorized for townships and counties. However, the official term of appointment for all planning commission and zoning board of appeals members is 3 years. Table 1 summarizes the authorized size of planning commissions and zoning boards of appeals for Michigan’s cities and villages, townships, and counties. By Michigan statute, one planning commissioner serves on the zoning board of appeals. For counties and townships, at least one member of the legislative body must serve on the planning commission; cities and villages are not required to include a member of the legislative body on a planning commission but may do so if they choose.

**Table 1. Number of members and joint membership, authorized by state statute, on planning commissions (PC) and zoning boards of appeals (ZBA) for Michigan cities and villages, townships and counties.**

Type of jurisdiction	Number of members authorized by statute	Elected officials serving on planning commission	Planning commissioners serving on ZBA
City/village PC	5, 7 or 9, depending on population	1	
City/village ZBA	At least 5		1
Township PC	5 to 9	1	
Township ZBA	at least 3 (pop. less than 5,000)		
	at least 5 (pop. greater than 5,000)		1
County PC	5 to 11	1 to 3	
County ZBA	3 to 7		1

<sup>3</sup> Municipal Planning Act of 1931, MCL 125.31-45; Township Planning Act of 1959, MCL 125.321-333; County Planning Act of 1945, MCL 125.101-115; Joint Municipal Planning Act of 2003, MCL 125.131-143; City and Village Zoning Act of 1921, MCL 125.581-600; Township Zoning Act of 1943, MCL 125.271-310; County Zoning Act of 1943, MCL 125.201-240.

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# Education and Training for Planning Officials in Michigan

The need for education and training of local land use decision makers was recognized by the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council (MLULC) commissioned by Gov. Granholm in 2003. In its report, the council recommended that 60 percent of planning and zoning officials complete basic land use planning, zoning, and smart growth educational programs by 2010 and document participation in such programs within 1 year of appointment. The council also noted that “local officials, citizens, property owners, and the development community have a wide range of educational opportunities available to improve land use and related decisions...” (MLULC, 2003). These opportunities are provided by private planning consultants such as the Planning and Zoning Center, and organizations such as the Michigan Association of Planning, the Michigan Municipal League, and the Michigan Townships Association, as well as by Michigan State University Extension (MSUE).

The Planning and Zoning Center (PZC) of Lansing<sup>4</sup> is one of many private consultants offering training sessions for local planning officials throughout Michigan. The PZC offers programs designed to orient the governing body, planning commission, zoning board of appeals, and the community attorney to their respective roles and responsibilities. The programs are tailored for specific audiences on the basis of local needs and interests and generally require 3 to 4 hours. The PZC estimates that more than 15,000 individuals, including elected and appointed officials, were served in more than 400 locations statewide between 1995 and 2005, an average of 1,500 individuals per year (Planning and Zoning Center, 2005).

The Michigan Association of Planning (MAP; formerly the Michigan Society of Planning) offers basic and advanced training programs for planning officials. These programs are typically daylong workshops offered at a regional level, although MAP will make the programs available locally upon request. In addition, MAP offers a broad range of educational opportunities at its annual statewide conference. MAP has estimated that its programs reach more than 1,300 individuals annually, including professional planners (primarily at its annual meeting) and local planning officials.

Organizations such as the Michigan Municipal League (MML) and the Michigan Townships Association (MTA) focus their educational programs primarily on the needs of elected municipal (city and village council) and township (township board) officials. However, each organization provides basic and more advanced training opportunities for planning commission and zoning board of appeals members. The MML offers sessions approximately monthly, each lasting around 3 hours. The MTA provides two to three daylong or part-day workshops per year that are specifically geared for planning officials. The MTA also offers on-site training at the request of a local government.

The MSUE Citizen Planner Program addresses the basic, ongoing training needs of citizens appointed to serve on local land use planning boards and commissions. It equips community leaders and interested citizens with technical knowledge, understanding of the legal framework of planning and zoning, leadership skills to perform their duties more effectively, and a forum to build a volunteer corps of program participants/graduates to advance good land use planning and foster land use education within their communities. The program has, to date, been conducted as a series of face-to-face courses taken over a 7- to 10-week period. The classroom-based Citizen Planner Program has reached nearly 2,400 planning officials since its inception, an average of about 570 individuals per year.

Participation in these various education and training programs suggests that fewer than 25 percent of Michigan’s planning officials avail themselves of these opportunities in any given year. Given the short tenure of most planning officials and the dynamic nature of planning issues and land use change, meeting the MLULC educational goals and keeping planning officials proficient with current, state-of-the-art information and resources will require a greater penetration of educational programming into the ranks of local planning officials.

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<sup>4</sup>Starting February 1, 2006, the Planning and Zoning Center is now part of Michigan State University Extension and the Land Policy Institute at MSU. For more information, watch the Land Policy Institute Web site: [www.landpolicy.msu.edu/](http://www.landpolicy.msu.edu/)

# Expanding Educational Reach Through Online Programming

Broadening current education and training opportunities for local planning officials in Michigan may be achieved using the Internet and other digital media. Increasingly, educational institutions are looking to online instruction as a way to reach a larger number and broader population of students. There are also online educational opportunities provided by for-profit and not-for-profit private interests. In the fall of 2003, more than 1.9 million students were studying online; schools expected the number of online students to grow past 2.6 million by the fall of 2004 (Allen and Seaman, 2004). Closer to home, Michigan State University's Virtual University offers courses and instructional programs through the Internet and other technologically enhanced media without the time and place constraints of traditional university programs. MSU currently offers 30 degree, certificate, and non-credit programs that can be completed online. MSU has annual online enrollment of more than 10,000 students.

Though a small number of land use education programs is available online, their content is quite general and is complementary to rather than a substitute for specific, Michigan-based training for Michigan's locally appointed planning and zoning officials. As MSUE considers potential opportunities offered by Internet resources, expansion of the Citizen Planner Program to an Internet format appears to be a viable option for extending the program to a larger number of planning officials than the face-to-face program currently reaches. However, designing, developing, and implementing a successful online land use education program requires consideration of several key questions:

- What are the professional development and information needs of planning officials?

- What kinds of training formats do planning officials prefer?
- Is there a demand for an online program of study for planning officials?

In addition, in response to questions about the effectiveness of the online program, as well as the face-to-face program, and to meet the documentation recommendation of the MLULC, an additional question is key:

- Would planning officials participate in a certification program to document their participation in education and training programs?

To answer the questions posed above, a mail survey and a series of focus groups were conducted during summer and fall of 2004. The survey, mailed to local planning officials in Michigan counties, townships, cities, and villages, was designed to gain information on the education and training preferences of Michigan's planning and zoning officials. Based on previous research investigating use of technology-mediated instruction and Web-based innovations, the survey addressed technology-related issues, cultural context, and metacognitive skills (Brace-Govan and Gabbott, 2004; Clark and Mayer, 2003; Thurmond and Wambach, 2004). Specifically, the survey asked about computer experience, technology perceptions and technology access, level of prior knowledge, sources and processes used to learn new things, engagement and interaction preferences, and current learning context. The focus groups served to provide additional information about survey responses and to probe more deeply into learning style preferences.

## Survey of Planning Officials

A 23-question survey was developed and distributed statewide (see Appendix A) to 953 communities. (Appendix B summarizes the process of selecting the number of communities to receive the survey.) The population from which the sample of 953 communities was selected consists of those communities with comprehensive plans. A 2003 survey conducted by the Michigan State University Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR) asked whether cities, villages, townships, and counties had comprehensive or master plans. As Table 2 illustrates, IPPSR received completed

surveys from 1,692 (of 1,857) local governments, 1,226 of which indicated that they had comprehensive plans (McGrain and Baumer, 2004). Since the IPPSR survey, one additional city has completed a comprehensive plan, bringing the total to 1,227. Of that 1,227, 21 percent are cities, 13 percent are villages, 61 percent are townships, and 5 percent are counties. To reflect this distribution, the 953 surveys were mailed, using random selection, to 198 cities, 121 villages, 586 townships, and 48 counties.

**Table 2. Michigan jurisdictions' possession of master or comprehensive plan by community type.**

	Yes	Type of community				Total
		City	Village	Township	County	
Has your community adopted a master or comprehensive plan?	Yes	255*	155	756	61	1227
	No	12	67	364	22	465
<b>Total responding</b>		267	222	1120	83	1692

Source: McGrain and Baumer, 2004.

\*Since McGrain and Baumer's report was released, an additional city has adopted a master plan. This number reflects this addition.

Because a comprehensive list of planning and zoning officials (names and addresses) does not exist, recipients of the surveys were contacted through the jurisdictional clerks. Specifically, a copy of the survey and a letter to the planning official was mailed to the jurisdictional clerk in each of the units selected. Each clerk also received a cover letter asking him or her to forward the survey and letter to a member of the local planning commission. The letter to the clerks asked that they target planning commission members who had not participated in the face-to-face Citizen Planner Program, since the preferences of those who had not chosen that type of educational program were of particular interest. Appropriate University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS IRB#04507) information was also included in the letter. Address information for clerks was compiled from the member

directories of the Michigan Municipal League, the Michigan Townships Association, and the Michigan Association of Counties.

Preaddressed and stamped envelopes were also sent with the survey forms. For tracking purposes, the return envelopes were coded (T for township, C for city, CO for county, and V for village) to track responses and enable accurate mailings of a follow-up postcard. At all times, however, the name of the jurisdictional clerk was kept in a separate location from the tracking code. The initial survey was mailed July 9, 2004, and a follow-up postcard reminding clerks of the survey was sent to communities that had not responded by July 29. A total of 413 surveys was returned, for a response rate of 43 percent.

## Survey Findings

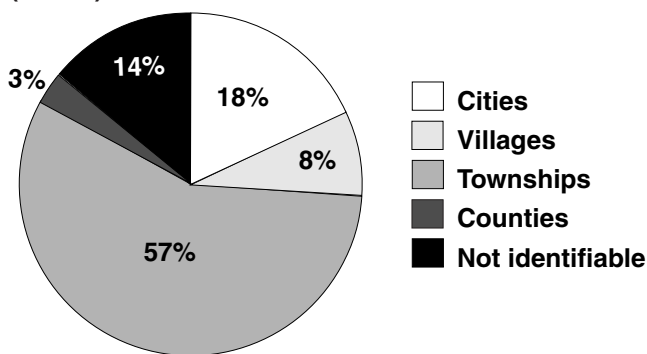
### Respondent Demographics

Table 3 summarizes where survey forms were sent and from where they were returned. Of the 198 survey forms mailed to cities, 76 (38 percent) were completed and returned. Thirty-three completed surveys were returned from villages (27 percent of those mailed); 231 completed surveys came from townships (39 percent of those mailed), and 14 of 48 surveys mailed to counties

were returned (29 percent). Thus, as illustrated in Figure 1, 18 percent of the 413 surveys returned came from cities, 8 percent from villages, 56 percent from townships, and 3 percent from counties. Fourteen percent of completed surveys were returned in envelopes without codes to identify the location of the respondent.

No attempt was made to ensure that survey forms were mailed to assess broad geographic coverage, but the returned surveys represent a fairly even coverage of the state, except for the Upper Peninsula. Figure 2 shows the proportion of returned surveys from each Michigan State University Extension region. The number of surveys returned from the Upper Peninsula was somewhat small compared with returns from the other regions. However, as Figure 3 illustrates, fewer communities in the Upper Peninsula have comprehensive plans — thus, fewer surveys were mailed to the Upper Peninsula. When asked about growth pressures in their counties, just over 81 percent of respondents indicated that their counties had experienced significant growth pressure in the past 5 years, and 83 percent responded that growth pressure would increase in the next 5 years.

**Figure 1. Proportion of total survey respondents from cities, villages, townships, and counties (n=413).**



**Table 3. Number of surveys mailed to and number of respondents from cities, villages, townships and counties.**

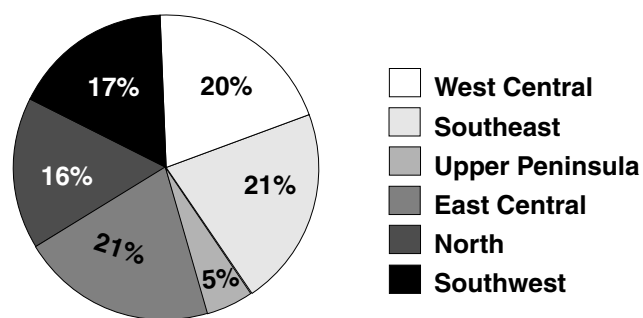
	Number of survey forms mailed	Number of completed surveys received	Percent response rate
<b>Cities</b>	198	76	38%
<b>Villages</b>	121	33	27%
<b>Townships</b>	586	231	39%
<b>Counties</b>	48	14	29%
<b>Unknown*</b>		59	
<b>Totals</b>	953	413	43%

\*Because some surveys were returned without a coded envelope, jurisdictional type could not be determined.

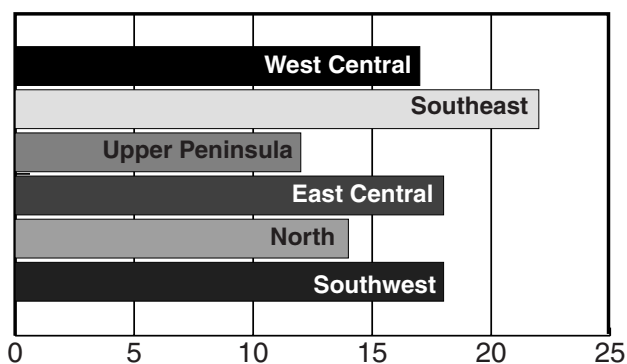
The ages of survey respondents ranged from 21 to 83 years; the average age of respondents was 55. As illustrated in Figure 4, almost two-thirds of the survey respondents were age 50 or above. The survey asked respondents about their level of educational attainment. Table 4 shows the results for this survey and compares them to the results obtained by Wiesing in his 1996 survey. The results are strikingly similar. Fifty-seven percent of respondents in our study reported an associate degree or higher; just over 55 percent of respondents in Wiesing's study reported the same.

The survey assessed computer and Internet availability for planning officials. As shown in Figure 5, 82.7 percent of respondents had computers at home and 78.4 percent had Internet access at home. Moreover, 58.1 percent had computers at work, and 55.6 percent had Internet access at work. Only 5 percent of respondents reported no access to a computer or to the Internet.

**Figure 2. Geographic location of respondents (by Michigan State University Extension region, as delineated at time of survey) (n=354).**



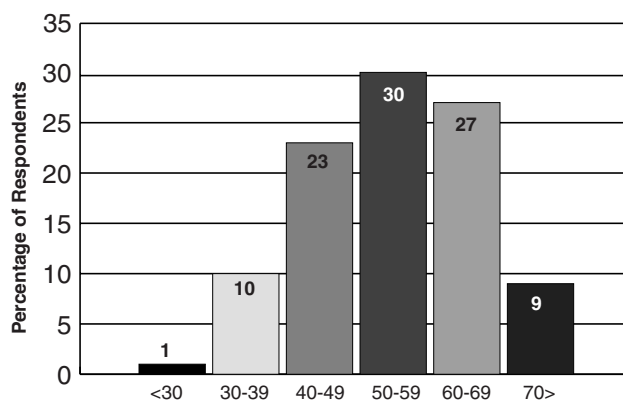
**Figure 3. Proportion of communities in each Michigan State University Extension region that had comprehensive plans, as of 2004.**



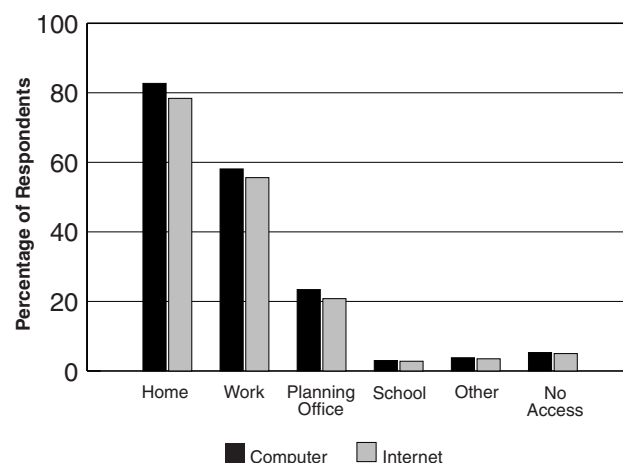
**Table 4. Educational attainment of planning officials responding to this survey and to the 1996 Wiesing survey.**

Educational attainment	Respondents – this survey (percent) n=394	Respondents – Wiesing survey (percent) n=183
High school	12.7	12.6
Some college	29.4	32.3
Associate degree	12.2	12.6
Bachelor's degree	24.4	12.0
College courses beyond bachelor's degree		30.6
Graduate/professional degree	19.4	

**Figure 4. Age distribution of survey respondents (n=392).**



**Figure 5. Respondents' reported location of access to computer and Internet use (n=399).**



## Respondents as Public Officials

As mentioned above, this study targeted members of planning commissions and zoning boards of appeals. However, because the surveys were mailed to the city, village, township, and county clerks and they were asked to forward the survey to the intended recipients, it was inevitable that some of the survey forms would make their way to elected officials not serving on a planning commission, as well as to planning staff members in the communities. In some cases, the clerk may have completed and returned the survey, although we have no way of knowing whether this occurred. Table 5 shows the number of planning commission and zoning board of appeals members that responded to the survey and the number of respondents who indicated they were in elected positions. In addition, it appears that the clerks gave a substantial number of the surveys to individuals who chaired their respective boards. Of the total 413 respondents, 124 (30 percent) indicated that they chaired their planning commission or zoning board of appeals.

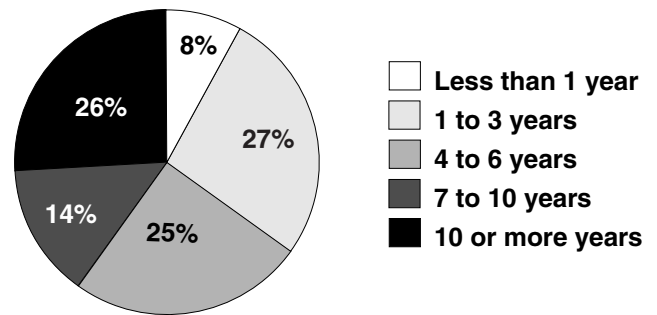
**Table 5. Number of respondents serving on planning commissions and zoning boards of appeals, and number of respondents serving in other elected and appointed positions (n=398).**

Positions	Number in role
Planning commission member	287 (39 elected)
Zoning board of appeals member	68 (9 elected)
Other elected official	28
Other non-elected official	15

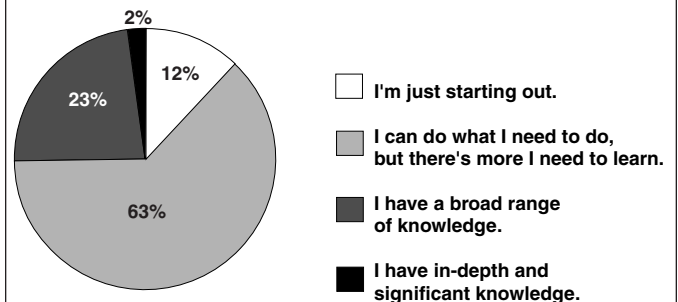
Respondents were also asked to indicate their years in service in their current roles. Their responses are summarized in Figure 6. Almost 60 percent of respondents indicated that their length of service was 6 years or less, with 26 percent reporting 4 to 6 years. This result is consistent with the results obtained by Wiesing, who found that, among the planning commission members he surveyed, the mean number of years of service was 5.8.

Respondents were asked to assess their skill levels as planning officials. The respondents selected from a set of possible responses (Figure 7), and 63 percent replied, "I can do what I need to do quite well, but there's more I need to learn." Just over 2 percent responded, "I have in-depth and significant knowledge and experience in this field and do not need additional training." Though only 8 percent of respondents indicated less than 1 year

**Figure 6. Respondents' length of service in current roles (n=389).**



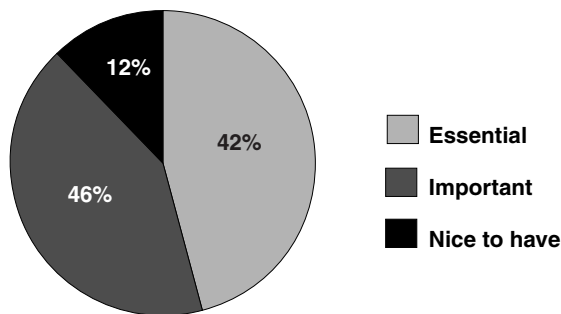
**Figure 7. Respondents' assessment of their skill levels as planning officials (n=389).**



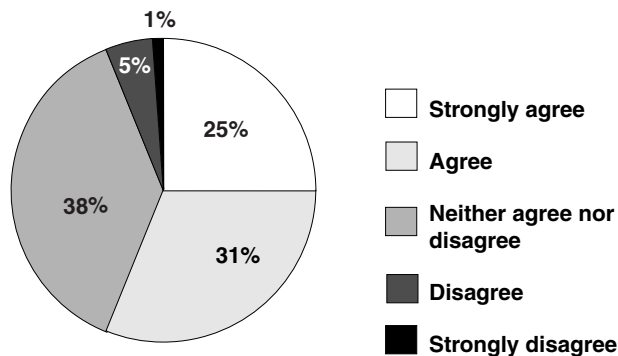
in their planning official roles, 12 percent indicated that, in terms of their skill levels, "I am just starting out." In some communities, planning commissions and zoning boards of appeals meet infrequently, so that even a member with more than a year of service could have attended very few meetings and addressed very few issues.

When asked about the importance of participating in ongoing planning-related education or training, respondents overwhelmingly recognized its importance. As shown in Figure 8, 42 percent of respondents indicated that such education and training is essential, and another 46 percent indicated it is important. Thirteen percent indicated that it is nice to have, and only one respondent indicated that education and training are unnecessary. When asked whether appropriate training might induce them to serve longer as planning officials, almost 56 percent responded in the affirmative (Figure 9).

**Figure 8. Respondents' views on the importance of participating in ongoing planning-related education and training (n=394).**



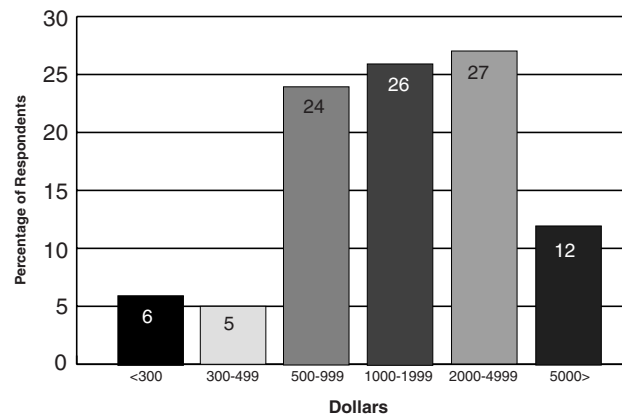
**Figure 9. Respondents' views on whether appropriate training would induce them to serve longer as planning officials (n=382).**



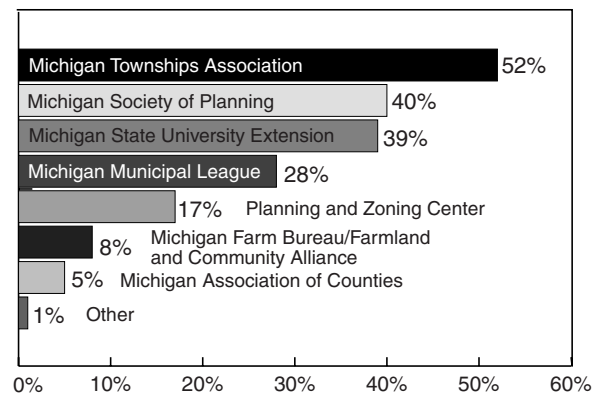
In response to questions about jurisdictions' budgets to pay for planning-related education and training, most respondents (79.4 percent) reported that their jurisdictions do have such a budget. Respondents were also asked how much their jurisdictions budget annually for planning-related training activities (Figure 10). Many respondents chose not to answer this question - perhaps because they did not know. Among those who did respond, almost 27 percent reported between \$2,000 and \$4,999 available for training activities. Almost 35 percent indicated a budget of \$999 or less. To put these numbers in perspective, the cost for a township planning commission of five members to complete the Citizen Planner Program (18 contact hours) is \$1,575. Program costs vary widely across providers in Michigan, but an average of \$20 per hour per person is typical.

In their responses to questions about where they received planning-related education and training, over half indicated the MTA as a source (Figure 11). The identification of the MTA as a source of education and training is not surprising because township officials

**Figure 10. Jurisdictional budgets for planning-related education and training (n=161).**



**Figure 11. Respondents' sources of planning-related education and training (n=401).**



represented more than half of survey respondents. Both MSUE and MAP (Michigan Society of Planning at the time of the survey) were identified as important providers of education and training for local planning officials — MAP was selected by 40 percent of respondents and MSUE by 39 percent. The MML, the other local government organization that provides significant educational programming, was identified by 28 percent of respondents as a source of education and training.

The survey asked a series of questions about the format of planning-related education and training programs that respondents had attended in the previous 5 years. The use of reference materials and independent research by respondents were also questioned. Responses to these questions are summarized in Table 6. By far, the most common format for planning-related education is a face-to-face classroom scenario. The next most common is participation in teleconferences. Few respondents had participated in Internet-based or CD-based education programs. Most had conducted independent study of reference materials. Respondents

**Table 6. Proportion of respondents who have participated in planning-related training programs of various formats (n=399).**

Education/training format	Number of times in past 5 years			
	None	1 to 3	4 to 5	More than 5
Face-to-face classroom	21.7%	49.6%	14.1%	14.6%
Internet based, instructor-facilitated	92.5%	6.4%	0.5%	0.5%
Internet based, self-paced, no instructor	84.4%	4.0%	0.3%	1.3%
CD-ROM or DVD, self-paced, no instructor	91.2%	7.8%	0.0%	1.1%
Videoconferencing (one-way satellite or two-way interactive video)	90.3%	9.1%	0.3%	0.3%
Teleconferencing	80.8%	15.2%	1.3%	2.7%
Telecourse	93.9%	5.3%	0.3%	0.5%
Independent study of reference materials	10.2%	36.0%	13.3%	36.5%

**Table 7. Proportion of respondents who have participated in any education or training programs of various formats and their comfort levels with the formats.**

Education/training format	Percent who have participated in format	Percent who are comfortable with format
Face-to-face classroom (n=400)	82.5	86.3
Internet based, instructor-facilitated (n=399)	13.3	57
Internet based, self-paced, no instructor (n=400)	13.5	54.3
CD-ROM or DVD, self-paced, no instructor (n=399)	17	55.5
Videoconferencing (one-way satellite or two-way interactive video) (n=399)	17	43.1
Teleconferencing (n=400)	28.3	44.3
Telecourse (n=400)	15.5	44.1
Independent study of reference materials (n=400)	52.5	69.3

were also asked about their participation in various types of training programs in general, not just planning-related, and their comfort level with various formats. These responses are summarized in Table 7. For education programs generally, face-to-face classroom formats are by far the most common — 82.5 percent had participated, and 86.3 indicated that they were comfortable with that format. In contrast, just over 13 percent of respondents had participated in any sort of Internet-based training, and fewer than 60 percent indicated they were comfortable with that type of format.

The number of respondents who had participated in some sort of planning-related education or training in the previous 5 years is higher than one might expect, given the participation rates observed by the various training programs. This may suggest some bias in the survey sample, given that almost 31 percent of respondents were serving as chair of their local planning commissions or zoning boards of appeals. Individuals in that role may be more likely to seek out educational opportunities. Also, if the jurisdictional clerk selected to forward the survey to a planning

official whom he or she respected or believed to be particularly knowledgeable, that official might be more likely to have sought planning-related training.

### **Respondents' Views on Format and Content of Planning-related Education and Training**

The survey included a series of questions designed to assess planning officials' objectives for participating in planning-related education and training programs. Table 8 summarizes responses to these questions. Respondents were most interested in education and training opportunities that would help them do their planning and/or zoning job better and prevent or reduce lawsuits by helping them make more informed decisions. Table 9 summarizes respondents' interest in various activities in terms of their ability to help them become better planning officials. Not surprisingly, respondents were most interested in opportunities to obtain useful answers to urgent questions. Next, they were interested in opportunities to solve real-world problems. Beyond that, access to books or other

references and to peers for double-checking their understanding of the field were deemed important.

Given the emphasis on obtaining answers to useful questions and the number of respondents who have accessed reference materials for education and training, answers to survey questions on the kinds of planning- and zoning-related education resources desired are not unexpected. As shown in Table 10, obtaining

information updates from reliable sources about pertinent developments in the field was indicated as the type of materials of greatest interest to respondents. Slightly fewer respondents expressed interest in access to a database of examples of planning and zoning. While still of interest to respondents, an online library with general information and a database of recent and pending lawsuits were less favored.

**Table 8. Respondents' preferences for specific planning-related education and training outcomes (n=400).**

Outcome of education/training	Strongly interested	Somewhat interested	Not very interested	Not at all interested
Helps me do my planning/zoning job better	65.4	30.2	3.5	1.1
Makes my planning/zoning job easier or less painful	43.1	41.5	11.7	3.7
Makes me feel that I'm making a positive difference	46.8	39.7	11.05	2.4
Prevents or reduces lawsuits by helping me make more informed decisions	60.8	31.1	7	1

**Table 9. Respondents' interest in activities that relate to becoming better planning officials (n=400).**

Outcome of education/training	Strongly interested	Somewhat interested	Not Very interested	Not at all interested
Having real-world problem-solving opportunities	33.9	51.4	11.2	3.4
Sharing stories with peers	15.4	48.7	30.9	5.0
Double-checking understanding of the field with peers	17.6	57.0	22.0	3.4
Double-checking understanding of the field through books or other references	21.0	53.5	22.8	2.6
Networking with peers in person	20.3	45.8	27.9	6.1
Networking with peers by phone	15.4	38.6	38.1	7.8
Networking with peers online (n=398)	18.5	44.4	25.8	10.7
Developing professional relationships with peers	18.9	46.3	27.7	7.2
Getting useful answers to urgent questions	68.4	28.0	2.6	1.0

**Table 10. Types of planning- and zoning-related education resources of interest to respondents.**

Types of resources interested	Strongly interested	Somewhat interested	Not very interested	Not at all
Online resource library with general information (n=400)	53.9	28.7	12.6	4.8
Information updates from reliable sources about pertinent developments in the field (n=400)	55.4	38.6	4.7	1.3
A database of recent and pending lawsuits (n=399)	29	37.0	28.4	5.6
A database of examples of planning and zoning (n=400)	6.5	38.4	8.7	1.8

The last set of survey questions was designed to assess planning officials' views about whether planning-related education and training should be required to serve as a planning official, whether continuing education should be required to continue to serve, and whether a credentialing examination would be of interest. Respondents appeared to feel quite strongly that training should be required to serve as a planning official. Over 71 percent of the planning officials surveyed agreed. When asked about when the training should be required, most respondents indicated that during the first year would be appropriate (Table 11). The next most favored time was whenever training was available. Only 3.8 percent of respondents indicated that training should not be required at any time. This

response contrasts with more than 28 percent of respondents who answered no when asked directly whether training should be required.

Those who responded that training should be required were asked how that training requirement could be met. Respondents could check all of the possibilities that they felt would be appropriate. These responses are provided in Table 12. Completing an examination to demonstrate having met training requirements was not a popular option with respondents. However, when asked whether they would be willing to take an examination to become a credentialed planning official, 67 percent of respondents indicated that they would. Figure 12 illustrates respondents' preferences for taking an exam, based in part on the length of the exam.

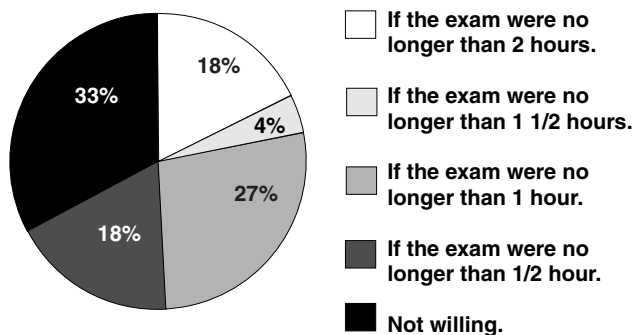
**Table 11. Respondents' views of when training for planning officials should be required (n=399).**

When training for planning officials should be required	Percent in agreement
Before appointment as a planning official	3.3
After appointment but before being allowed to serve	10.7
During the first year of appointment	47.0
Whenever training is available	35.2
Never - people already know enough and don't need training	3.8

**Table 12. Respondents' answers to the question "Which of the following approaches do you feel would demonstrate meeting training requirements?" (Check all that apply) (n=370).**

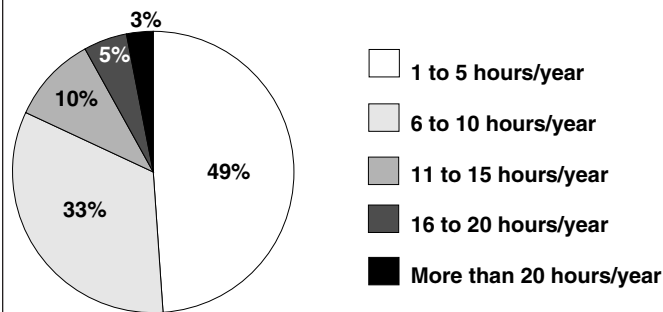
Approach for demonstrating that training requirement is met	Percent who indicated agreement
Completion of a series of related courses but no examination	53.1
Completion of one written examination	9.8
Completion of a series of related courses and a written examination for each	8.5

**Figure 12. Respondents' willingness to take an examination to become a credentialed planning official and acceptable examination length (n=371).**



Finally, respondents were asked about continuing education requirements for planning officials. Almost 80 percent indicated that continuing education is an appropriate requirement for continuing to serve as a planning official. However, slightly fewer (73 percent) indicated that they would be willing to do ongoing continuing education as a requirement for continuing to serve as a planning official. When asked how many hours per year of required continuing education would be appropriate, the largest percentage of respondents (49 percent) favored a 1 to 5 hours per year requirement. A 6 to 10 hours per year requirement was also favored by a sizeable number of respondents, but requirements greater than 10 hours did not receive substantial support. These responses are summarized in Figure 13.

**Figure 13. Respondents' preferences for amount of continuing education required for continuing to serve as a planning official (n=347).**



## Focus Groups of Planning Officials

To gain further insights into the survey responses provided by planning officials, focus groups of seven to 13 participants were conducted in Hickory Corners (southwestern Michigan), Novi (southeastern Michigan), Traverse City (northern lower Michigan) and Marquette (Upper Peninsula) during September and October 2004. Focus group participants were paid \$50 for their involvement in a 90-minute session. They represented a mix of land use planning experience, from those who had just been appointed to a planning commission or zoning board of appeals to those who had served on such commissions or boards for up to 20 years. Participants were not prescreened about either their familiarity with electronic delivery of training or their degree of competency and comfort with computer usage. Participants also represented a wide variety of community types, from rural areas to growing suburbs to older cities.

In addition to probing deeper into responses about training preferences received in the survey, the focus groups were also designed to develop a better understanding of participants' attitudes toward online educational and training opportunities. Below are specific questions and a summary of responses.

- **Why is training needed?** Newer participants were unsure of their roles and wanted a better understanding of those roles and their responsibilities. They desired information on basic concepts and issues they would likely face. Longer serving participants felt that the constantly changing face of planning and zoning required continuing education for them to keep abreast of new developments, issues, and best practices. Though all participants expressed a desire for training, those in more rural areas were more willing to accept the time commitment and work associated with training than those from metro Detroit.

- **What previous training has been obtained?** Participants represented a broad range of previous training experiences. Some indicated that they had no training at all when they volunteered to serve in their current position. In some municipalities, limited training was offered by the planning staff. Among those who had taken training seminars or courses, the primary providers were MAP (Michigan Society of Planning at the time of the focus groups), the MTA, and the MML.
- **What are barriers to additional training?** Surprisingly, cost was less of a barrier than expected. Most participants indicated that their municipality had a budget to cover the cost of training seminars. However, only the registration costs would be covered. Generally, participants were responsible for covering the costs of any travel and overnight stays required. It was clear, nevertheless, that unless the municipality covered the full cost of attending the training, most individuals would not participate.

Location was often cited as a barrier because it required substantial travel and/or overnight stays. Participants from urban areas cited battling traffic as a constraint. However, some participants from rural areas indicated that even a 2-hour drive was not excessive.

The biggest and often the most insurmountable constraint appeared to be scheduling. All participants were likely to be involved in other community activities and have family commitments. Some participants liked the idea of weekend programs so that they did not conflict with their work; others found weekend programs totally unacceptable because they took away from important family time. A few individuals liked the idea of concentrated courses — e.g., full-day sessions. Others felt that would be an overload. There was no consensus on an optimal scheduling approach.

- **What kind of training would be desired?** In general, participants wanted practical, hands-on information that would help them make decisions in their public roles. They were not looking to become planning experts. As expected, the amount of time served as a planning official affected desired training. Newly appointed participants were most concerned with learning basic terminology and simple legal issues. More experienced participants, especially those who had served for as long as 20 years, felt a need for specific information on new issues and approaches to planning and zoning that had particular relevance for their communities. Common topics of interest were managing conflict and running successful meetings. In addition, several participants wanted a greater understanding of how to communicate and work more effectively with the legislative bodies in their communities that would ultimately accept or reject their recommendations. What most participants did not want was training that required homework and testing. (However, a few participants noted that testing does provide some motivation to take the training more seriously and indicates whether mastery of the content has been achieved.)

One point that was common across all participants was the desire for training that helps them understand how other communities are handling problems similar to the ones they are facing. All participants expressed an interest in learning about practical methods that have been used successfully in other communities. They were also interested in attending training sessions that allow them to interact with individuals from other communities and establish a potential resource base of people with whom they could exchange information.

Finally, participants felt that a good training program would give them a binder or manual at the end of the session that they could consult for future reference. Some, however, expressed the reservation that printed manuals have a limited life span because issues or legal decisions can quickly make such material outdated.

Focus group participants also responded to a series of questions that sought input on preferred format for an online educational program. They provided comments on three potential delivery and resource scenarios that were based, in part, on survey results. The three scenarios were:

- **Synchronous course style**, featuring online synchronous presentations (live PowerPoint and audio presented over the Web by an instructor) that include an opportunity for live Q & A with the instructor.
- **Asynchronous course style**, in which participants need not be online at a particular time but have periodic deadlines for completing activities so the

group stays together as they go through the program, and for which an instructor is available by e-mail but is not online with the participants.

- **Resource style**, in which participants sign up for 1-year subscriptions enabling them to access online resources and to participate in periodic online presentations and face-to-face events.

Very few participants had any experience with electronic delivery of education and training. As a result, many expressed concerns about the negative aspects of non-face-to-face interactive instruction. Some were concerned about whether they had the typing skills that would be required to communicate effectively with an instructor and others. Participants also noted that electronic delivery formats impeded their ability to learn from their peers and have the kind of interaction that they felt was a worthwhile byproduct of training sessions. One participant who had a great deal of experience with online instruction felt that it was particularly important, when marketing an online program, to inform people of the software and hardware requirements that would be necessary to receive the instruction and take advantage of any interactive components satisfactorily.

Participants universally disliked the synchronous course style. They felt that, though it did solve the problem of having to travel elsewhere to receive instruction, it did not solve the scheduling problem. In addition, it limited their ability to meet and interact with other course participants — especially because that interaction would be within a rigid time schedule. Many felt that typing questions for the instructor to answer was distracting, and some worried about the time lag between when they asked a question and when the instructor would answer. They did not see this feature as an advantage and preferred a system where they could either phone or e-mail questions to get a response. Some participants were very averse to the idea of take-home assignments. They felt this was an additional time burden that, as volunteers, they were unwilling to assume. Some felt that it was important that there be some testing or assignment procedures that ensured they had mastered the material, but there was universal agreement that this should not be too demanding.

The asynchronous course style was strongly preferred over the first scenario. It had two advantages for participants: they would not have to travel to take the training and, more importantly, it offered the time flexibility that is lacking in either a traditional face-to-face training or the synchronous course style. Participants were still skeptical about electronic training, but they felt the flexibility offered by this option might override their concerns and make them at least willing to consider this format for training. Some participants indicated that combining a face-to-face experience with the online format, either at the opening session or the final session, would give them the desired

opportunity to meet with peers, exchange information, and potentially establish relationships that would give them additional long-term resources.

Participants looked at the third scenario, the resource style, as something totally different from the first two. They viewed this not as a formal training program but rather as a resource that could be used for specific problems or issues. Most felt they would not personally subscribe to such a service; instead, their municipalities

would subscribe and they would then have access to the service. Participants noted that such a site would have a significant advantage over manuals because it could be regularly updated with the latest information. However, they wanted assurance that the site would be constantly maintained and updated with the newest information and resources. In general, participants felt there was value in this approach, but they did not see it as an alternative to formal training.

## Conclusions

The survey of planning officials and the focus groups offered a number of significant findings that help answer the questions posed for this study:

- What are the professional development and information needs of planning officials?
- What kinds of training formats do planning officials prefer?
- Is there a demand for an online program of study for planning officials?
- Would planning officials participate in a certification program to document their participation in education and training programs?

### Professional development and information needs of planning officials

Planning officials perceived that they would benefit from additional training and education. More than 71 percent of survey respondents felt training should be a requirement for serving as a planning official. Focus group participants had similar views. A Marquette focus group participant, for example, described a common situation in Michigan: "When I started, I had no idea what my responsibilities were. Do you vote your heart or how? I think that is important to know if you are going to get on the commission. You have to have a background to know what you are there for."

The types of learning experiences and information that planning officials are most interested in include useful answers to urgent questions, education that helps them do their job better, education that prevents or reduces lawsuits by helping them make more informed decisions, and real-world problem-solving opportunities. The context in which planning officials work requires timely, information-intensive decision making. A Novi focus group participant, for example, stated, "A topic that comes up often in our community is rezoning. Usually it is to increase density. I am generally opposed to rezoning because residents don't want it. They are depending on that master plan and

that zoning. But we get a lot of requests for that. We need to know: What questions should be asked? Under what circumstances? Whether it is practical?" A focus group participant from Marquette described the typical context in which planners need information to make decisions: "A lot of times they'll give you a packet right before the meeting and want a quick decision. They want you to rush a decision that could affect us 20 years down the road."

The survey and focus groups identified the importance of specifying requisite experience level for training modules and developing a curriculum with modules appropriate to various experience levels. Survey results showed planning officials with beginning to intermediate skill levels were more interested in training that both made their planning job easier and helped them perform better at their job. Conversely, planning officials with more than 10 years of experience were the least interested in training that helped them to perform their jobs better and felt the opportunity to learn from peers in person is more important than having the convenience of learning online.<sup>5</sup>

### Training format preferred by planning officials

Survey results indicate that planning officials are most comfortable with learning through face-to-face training and independent study of references, although more than half indicated comfort with an Internet-based format with an instructor. Respondents value time and place flexibility. Scheduling training events using traditional face-to-face delivery was seen as problematic, as was the synchronous (time-dependent) program format scenario. A Novi focus group participant described a typical scenario: "I have a 40-hour-a-week job. A lot of training things are during the week and during the day. I can't go." The relatively high level of reported Internet access reduces one of the deterrents to an online training experience. The need to customize the course content at least minimally to meet the unique needs of widely variant community development challenges was made clear. Discussions

<sup>5</sup>Survey results were cross-tabulated, and chi-square tests were applied with a .05 level of confidence.

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with focus group participants identified their perceptions that an online program lacks opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction or communication with subject matter experts, and that the program may not be an effective learning experience as a result.

### **Demand for an online program of study**

The target population for the Citizen Planner Program is the estimated 14,000 local elected and appointed officials serving on planning commissions and zoning boards of appeals in Michigan. Within that population, the Citizen Planner Program is targeting a smaller group that is more likely to participate in planning-related training in an online format. Survey results indicate that officials who have served less than 10 years are more interested in planning-related training than are those officials who have been in the role longer. The survey suggests that 80 percent of respondents have a budget for planning-related training.

The study points to a strong willingness to try online offerings and a preference for online compared with other forms of technology-mediated instruction, such as videoconferencing. Survey results were reinforced by focus group participants, who indicated the desire for time and place flexibility. A strong desire for on-demand “useful answers to urgent questions” was indicated in the survey and focus groups. The majority of focus group participants preferred the self-paced, anytime, anywhere scenario. They did not want to be tied to a specific time/day configuration, and they expressed interest in a combination of learning/training and resource access.

### **Interest in a program to document mastery of educational material**

A substantial majority of survey respondents are interested in participating in activities that would improve their knowledge of planning and zoning and their effectiveness in those roles, including required training, examinations to become credentialed planning officials, and ongoing continuing education. However, one-third of survey respondents were not interested in taking an examination, and there was considerable aversion to the examination idea among focus group participants. Nevertheless, some in the focus groups felt that an examination would be useful to document mastery of the training material. In all cases, though, there was agreement that such an examination should not be too demanding. Survey respondents who were interested in an examination rallied around a maximum time commitment of 1 hour for such an examination.

An overarching conclusion from this study is that a valuable opportunity exists to extend educational opportunities for local planning officials through an online format. In recognition of this opportunity, a pilot online model has been developed and field tested, its format based on results of the survey and the focus groups. The question most commonly asked by online program participants was, “When will the entire program be available online?” Work continues on completing the online program. In addition, other providers of education and training programs for planning officials are collaborating with MSUE to develop a credentialing examination and a plan for continuing education guidelines. All of these providers of educational programs, as well as those who will benefit from new programs, owe a debt of gratitude to the planning officials from across Michigan who responded to the mail survey and participated in the focus groups.

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# Appendix A: Mail Survey Instrument

## Michigan State University Citizen Planner Program A Survey for Michigan Planning Officials

For each question, check or circle the answer(s) that best applies to you in your role as a planning official. For this survey, we use "planning official" to describe all appointed and elected officials involved in local government planning and zoning decisions.

### Demographic Data and Professional Status

The purpose of this section is to help us learn about planning and zoning officials in Michigan.

1. In what year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_
  
  2. What is your education level? (check one)
    - a.  High school degree
    - b.  Some college
    - c.  Associates degree
    - d.  Undergraduate degree
    - e.  Some graduate courses
    - f.  Graduate/Professional degree
  
  3. Which of the following best describes your role as a planning official?
    - a. I am an (check one)
      - elected
      - appointed
    - b. member of a (check all that apply)
      - planning commission/zoning board
      - zoning board of appeals
    - c. chairperson of either a planning commission/zoning board or zoning board of appeals
      - yes
      - no
  
  4. How long have you been in this role? (check one)
    - a.  Less than one year
    - b.  1-3 years
    - c.  4-6 years
    - d.  7-10 years
    - e.  10 or more years
  
  5. From which organizations do you receive planning-related education and training? (check all that apply)
    - a.  Michigan Association of Counties
    - b.  Michigan Farm Bureau/Farmland & Community Alliance
    - c.  Michigan Municipal League
-

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- d. ( ) Michigan Society of Planning
  - e. ( ) Michigan State University Extension
  - f. ( ) Michigan Townships Association
  - g. ( ) Planning and Zoning Center
  - h. ( ) Other (describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Which of the following best describes your skill level as a planning official? (check one)**

- a. ( ) I'm just starting out and have much to learn.
- b. ( ) I can do what I need to do quite well, but there's more I need to learn.
- c. ( ) I have a broad range of knowledge and experience in this field.
- d. ( ) I have in-depth and significant knowledge and experience in this field and do not need additional training.

**7. There has been significant growth pressure in my county during the past five years.**

- a. ( ) Strongly agree
- b. ( ) Agree
- c. ( ) Undecided
- d. ( ) Disagree
- e. ( ) Strongly disagree

**8. Growth pressure in my county will increase significantly in the next five years.**

- a. ( ) Strongly agree
- b. ( ) Agree
- c. ( ) Undecided
- d. ( ) Disagree
- e. ( ) Strongly disagree

**Education and Training Opportunities**

The purpose of this section is to help us learn about the kinds of education and training opportunities that are useful to Michigan planning officials.

**9. Does your jurisdiction have a budget that pays for planning-related education and training?**

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

**If yes, what would you estimate your municipality's annual planning-related training budget to be? \_\_\_\_\_**

**10. How would you rate the importance of participating in ongoing planning-related education or training?**

- a. ( ) Essential
- b. ( ) Important
- c. ( ) Nice to have
- d. ( ) Unnecessary

**11. In what types of planning-related education or training are you most interested?**

For each of the following, circle the number that best indicates your level of interest.

(4 = Strongly Interested; 3 = Somewhat Interested; 2 = Not Very Interested; 1 = Not at all interested)

<b>I would participate in planning/zoning-related education or training that...</b>				
Helps me do my planning/zoning job better	4	3	2	1
Makes my planning/zoning job easier or less painful	4	3	2	1
Makes me feel that I'm making a positive difference	4	3	2	1
Prevents or reduces lawsuits by helping me make more informed, knowledgeable decisions	4	3	2	1
<b>I would like to have access to the following planning/zoning-related education resources:</b>				
An online resource library which has general information	4	3	2	1
Information updates from reliable sources about pertinent developments in the field	4	3	2	1
A database of recent and pending lawsuits	4	3	2	1
A database of examples of planning and zoning	4	3	2	1

**12. For each of the activities listed below, indicate your level of interest as it relates to helping you become a better planning official.**

(4 = Strongly Interested; 3 = Somewhat Interested; 2 = Not Very Interested; 1 = Not at all interested)

Having real-world problem-solving opportunities	4	3	2	1
Sharing stories with peers	4	3	2	1
Double-checking my understanding of the field with peers	4	3	2	1
Double-checking my understanding of the field through books or other references	4	3	2	1
Being able to network with my peers in person	4	3	2	1
Being able to network with my peers by phone	4	3	2	1
Being able to network with my peers online	4	3	2	1
Having the opportunity to develop professional relationships with my peers	4	3	2	1
Getting useful answers to urgent questions	4	3	2	1

**Education and Training Delivery Options and Considerations**

The purpose of this section is to help us learn more about your preferences for education and training.

**13. Describe your experience with and preferences for various types of learning opportunities by selecting all that apply:**

What types of education and training...	...have you participated in?			...are you comfortable with doing?		
	Yes	No		Yes	No	
Face-to-face classroom	Yes	No		Yes	No	
Internet-based, instructor-facilitated	Yes	No		Yes	No	
Internet-based, self-paced, no instructor	Yes	No		Yes	No	
CD-ROM or DVD, self-paced, no instructor	Yes	No		Yes	No	
Videoconferencing (1-way satellite or 2-way interactive video)	Yes	No		Yes	No	
Telephone conferencing	Yes	No		Yes	No	
Telecourse (broadcast television)	Yes	No		Yes	No	
Independent study of references	Yes	No		Yes	No	

14. For each item, select only one choice by circling the response that indicates how often you have had that planning-related education and training experience in the past five years.

How many planning-related professional development/training sessions have you attended in the past 5 years that were...				
Face-to-face classroom?	None	1-3	4-5	> 5
Internet-based, instructor-facilitated?	None	1-3	4-5	> 5
Internet-based, self-paced, no instructor?	None	1-3	4-5	> 5
CD-ROM or DVD, self-paced, no instructor	None	1-3	4-5	> 5
Videoconferencing (1-way satellite or 2-way interactive video)	None	1-3	4-5	> 5
Telephone conferencing	None	1-3	4-5	> 5
Telecourse (broadcast television, etc.)	None	1-3	4-5	> 5
How often in the past 5 years have you had to use reference materials and independent research to learn what is necessary to perform your role?	Never	1-3 times	4-5 times	> 5 times

15. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:  
(5 = Strongly Agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree)

I would be more likely to serve longer as a planning official if I had appropriate training	5	4	3	2	1
Planning-related education or training would help me perform my duties.	5	4	3	2	1
Being able to study from my home or office without having to travel to another location is important to me.	5	4	3	2	1
Time constraints would make it difficult for me to attend a classroom setting course.	5	4	3	2	1
I don't have time to take any courses.	5	4	3	2	1
Having opportunities to learn from my peers in person is more important to me than having the convenience of learning online.	5	4	3	2	1
I often have very limited time to learn as much as I can about an issue before figuring out what to do about it.	5	4	3	2	1
I am comfortable using computers and accessing the Internet.	5	4	3	2	1
I am comfortable using email.	5	4	3	2	1

### Computer and Internet Availability

The purpose of this section is to help us determine the computer and internet availability for planning officials.

16. Describe your access to a computer and Internet access (check all that apply):

I have access at...	Computer Access	Internet Access
Home		
Work		
Planning Office		
School		
Other		
No access		

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## Required Training Preferences

The purpose of this section is to help us learn more about planning officials' preferences for required training.

**17. Do you believe that planning officials should be required to receive training in order to serve as a planning official?**

Yes

No

**18. If you answered yes to Question 17, which of the following approaches do you feel would demonstrate meeting training requirements? (Check all that apply)**

a.  Complete a series of related courses designed for planning officials but no examination.

b.  Complete one written examination that reflects pertinent topics for planning officials.

c.  Complete a series of related courses designed for planning officials; pass written examinations for each.

**19. Should training be required (Check one)**

a.  Before appointment as a planning official.

b.  After appointment, but before the person is allowed to serve as a planning official.

c.  During the first year of appointment.

d.  Whenever training is available.

e.  Never, people already know enough and don't need training to be a planning official.

**20. Would you be willing to take an examination to become a credentialed planning official? (Check one)**

a.  Yes, if the exam were no longer than two hours.

b.  Yes, if the exam were no longer than one and a half hours.

c.  Yes, if the exam were no longer than one hour.

d.  Yes, if the exam were no longer than 30 minutes.

e.  No, I would not.

**21. Do you feel that ongoing continuing education is an appropriate requirement for continuing as a planning official?**

Yes

No

**22. Would you be willing to do ongoing continuing education as a requirement for continuing as a planning official?**

Yes

No

**23. In your opinion, how many hours of required continuing education per year is appropriate for continuing as a planning official?**

a.  1-5 hours/year

b.  6-10 hours/year

c.  11-15 hours/year

d.  16-20 hours/year

e.  More than 20 hours/year

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## Appendix B: Determination of Survey Sample Size

The sample size of 953 was established as follows:

$$SS=1/4\left(\frac{Z}{C}\right)^2$$

where:

SS = sample size for infinite population

Z = Z value for desired confidence level

C = desired confidence interval, expressed as a decimal (e.g., .05 = ±5 percent)

Working with a confidence interval of ±5 percent and a confidence level of 95 percent, the sample size for an infinite population is:

$$SS=1/4\left(\frac{1.96}{.05}\right)^2=384.16$$

The population of planning officials in Michigan is finite. With a conservative estimate of 14,000 planning officials in Michigan<sup>6</sup>, the sample size for the survey was calculated using:

$$SSS=\frac{SS}{1+\frac{SS-1}{pop}}=\frac{384.16}{1+\frac{383.16}{14,000}}=373.9$$

where:

SSS = the survey sample size

SS = the infinite population sample size

Pop = population

The desired sample size of 374 planning officials was rounded up to 380. With an anticipated response rate of at least 40 percent, a total of 953 surveys was mailed.

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<sup>6</sup>The exact number of current planning officials is unknown. The estimate of 14,000 is based on the number of cities, villages, townships, and counties with planning commissions and the number of members authorized by state statute, resulting in a range of 12,000 to 18,000.





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