Redevelopment Ready Communities®

Best Practices

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Program Overview

Redevelopment Ready Communities ® (RRC) is a state-wide program that certifies communities who actively engage stakeholders to vision and plan for the future. An RRC certification signals to business owners, developers and investors that the community has removed development barriers by building deliberate, fair and consistent processes. Certified Redevelopment Ready Communities® attract investment to create thriving places where people want to live, work and play.

Developed by experts in the public and private sector, the RRC Best Practices are the standard for evaluation. Each best practice addresses key elements of community and economic development, nurturing the potential of a community to meet the unique needs of businesses and residents.

Evaluations are conducted by the RRC team through interviews, observation and data analysis. After the evaluation, a community is presented with a report of findings and strategies to implement. To be awarded certification, a community must demonstrate all of the RRC Best Practice components have been met. Once a community is certified, RRC will assist in the promotion and marketing of up to three Redevelopment Ready Sites through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. These top sites are primed for new investment because they are located within a community that has effective policies, efficient processes and broad community support.

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Looking for more info?

Some parts of the Best Practices have further explanation. If a word is in blue, hover your mouse over it and a yellow box will appear for more information.

If you still have questions, feel free to contact the RRC team at RRC@michigan.org.

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1.1 – The Plans

This best practice evaluates community planning for redevelopment and how the redevelopment vision is embedded in the master plan.

The comprehensive master plan is a community's guiding framework for growth. The information and concepts presented in the master plan are intended to serve as a policy guide for local decisions about the physical, social, economic and environmental development of the community. The plan is updated every five years to provide a community with a current and relevant decision making tool. An updated comprehensive master plan is essential to articulating the types of development the community desires and the specific areas where the community will concentrate resources.

Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
The governing body has adopted a master plan in the past five years or has a master plan update in development.	- The master plan reflects the community's desired direction for the future. - The master plan update has a completion timeline in place, if applicable. - The master plan is accessible online.
The master plan identifies a strategy for redevelopment or a redevelopment plan.	- The redevelopment strategy/plan identifies priority redevelopment sites, neighborhoods and/or districts. - The redevelopment strategy/plan contains problem statements and goals for redevelopment sites, neighborhoods and/or districts. - The redevelopment strategy/plan specifies implementation strategies and tools to accomplish the stated goals and actions. - The redevelopment strategy/plan includes a 2-5 year timeline that identifies leadership and outreach, economic development, and planning and zoning benchmarks. - The community demonstrates it has attempted to hit the stated benchmarks and annually reports to the governing body on its progress.

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Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
The governing body has adopted a capital improvement plan.	• The capital improvement plan has a six-year minimum projection and is reviewed annually. • The capital improvement plan identifies current utility capabilities and considers if current infrastructure allows for development that has been identified in the redevelopment strategies. • The capital improvement plan considers the coordination of projects in the same area to minimize construction costs and impacts. • The capital improvement plan coordinates with the master plan and redevelopment strategy/plan. • The capital improvement plan coordinates with the budget approved by the governing body. • The capital improvement plan is accessible online.
The governing body has adopted a downtown development plan, if applicable.	• The downtown development plan has established boundaries of the development area. • The downtown development plan identifies existing improvements in the development area to be demolished, repaired, or altered, and includes estimated costs of the improvements and a timeline for completion. • The downtown development plan identifies any portions of the development area to be left as open space. • The downtown development plan considers pedestrian and/or transit oriented development. • The downtown development plan includes mixed-use elements. • The downtown development plan coordinates with the master plan, redevelopment strategy/plan and capital improvement plan. • The Downtown Development Authority plan coordinates, if applicable. • The downtown development plan is accessible online.

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Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
The governing body has adopted a corridor improvement plan, if applicable.	• The corridor improvement plan has established boundaries of the development area. • The corridor improvement plan identifies existing improvements in the development area to be demolished, repaired, or altered, and includes estimated costs of the improvements and timeline for completion. • The corridor improvement plan identifies any portions of the development area to be left as open space. • The corridor improvement plan considers pedestrian and/or transit oriented development. • The corridor improvement plan includes mixed-use elements. • The corridor improvement plan coordinates with the master plan, redevelopment strategy/plan and capital improvement plan. • The Corridor Improvement Authority plan coordinates, if applicable. • The corridor improvement plan is accessible online.

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1.2 – Public Participation

This best practice assesses how well the community identifies its stakeholders and engages them, not only during the master planning process, but on a continual basis.

Public participation is the process by which a community consults with interested or affected stakeholders before making a decision. It is two-way communication and collaborative problem solving with the objective of being intentionally inclusive, and the goal of achieving better and more acceptable decisions. Public participation aims to prevent or minimize disputes by creating a process for resolving issues before they become an obstacle.

The best master plans have the support of many stakeholders from businesses, residents, community groups and elected and appointed community officials. Public engagement should be more frequent and interactive than soliciting input only during the master plan update.

Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
The community has a public participation plan for engaging a diverse set of community stakeholders in land use decisions.	• The plan identifies key stakeholders, including those not normally at the visioning table. • The plan describes public participation methods and the appropriate venue to use each method. • If a third party is consulted, they adhere to the public participation plan.
The community demonstrates that public participation efforts go beyond the basic methods.	Basic Methods o Public Notice Act o Newspaper posting o Website posting o Flier posting on community hall door o Announcements at governing body meeting o Post card mailings o Attachments to water bills o Local cable notification Proactive Practices o Individual mailings o Charrettes o One-on-one interviews o Canvassing o Community workshops o Focus groups o Social networking o Crowdsourcing • Community tracks success of various methods.
The community shares outcomes of all public participation processes.	• Community participation results are communicated in a consistent and transparent manner.

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2.1 – Zoning Regulations

This best practice evaluates a community's zoning ordinance and how well the ordinance regulates for the goals of the master plan.

Zoning is a key tool to implement comprehensive and development plans in a community. Inflexible or obsolete zoning regulations can discourage redevelopment. Outdated regulations force developers to pursue rezoning or variance requests, disturbing project timelines, increasing costs, and creating uncertainty. Communities should look to streamline ordinances and regulate for the kind of development that is truly desired. In addition, zoning is an essential tool for shaping inviting walkable communities.

Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
The governing body has adopted a zoning ordinance that reflects the goals of the current master plan.	• The ordinance is easy to understand and articulates clear definitions. • The zoning ordinance is accessible online.

The zoning ordinance contains priority districts where zoning encourages the type and form of development desired.	• The community allows mixed-use in priority districts by right.
	
	• The community has considered a form-based code in priority districts.
	
	• Downtown or commercial districts consider the following:
	   o Build to lines
	   o Open store fronts
	   o Outdoor dining
	   o Ground floor signage standards
	   o Increased density
	   o Pedestrian friendly elements
	
	• Industrial districts permit more flexible uses that reflect new economy type businesses.

The zoning ordinance contains flexible zoning techniques that promote infill redevelopment.	• The ordinance identifies specific allowable locations for Planned Unit Development(s) and prohibits the waiver or weakening of environmental or design standards. • Conditional land-use and conditional zoning approval requirements are clearly defined. • The community responds to project requests in a consistent manner. • The community encourages mixed- use redevelopment.

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Evaluation Criteria	Expectations

The zoning ordinance allows for a variety of housing options.	• The ordinance identifies a variety of neighborhood classifications.
	
	• The community has considered allowing:
	   o Mixed density residential
	   o Residential uses in the downtown, if applicable
	   o Live/work units
	   o Mixed-income housing height bonus

The zoning ordinance includes elements for improved non-motorized safety and access.	• The community has considered a pedestrian and/or transit oriented development district(s). • The community has considered requiring bicycle parking spaces. • The ordinance describes minimum sidewalk width and street lighting requirements. • The ordinance describes streetscape and traffic calming requirements.

The zoning ordinance allows for more flexible parking requirements.	• The ordinance considers:
	   o The availability of on-street parking
	   o Requiring less impervious parking spaces
	   o Allowing for interconnected vehicle passage between lots
	   o Allowing shared parking agreements
	
	• The community has considered implementing alternative parking management strategies.

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3.1 – Site Plan Review Policy

This best practice evaluates the community's site plan review policies, project tracking and availability of development information.

Streamlined, well-documented site plan policies ensure a smooth and predictable experience when working with a community. Unnecessary steps and layers or unclear instructions increase time and expenses associated with development. Community leaders should look to simplify and clarify policies, operate in a transparent manner and increase efficiency to create an inviting redevelopment climate that is vital to attracting investment.

Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
The zoning ordinance articulates a thorough site plan review process.	• The zoning ordinance is updated by staff and approved by the governing body. • The zoning ordinance is accessible online.
The zoning ordinance documents the responsibilities of the governing body, community staff, zoning board of appeals, planning commission and other reviewing bodies.	• The zoning ordinance is updated by staff and approved by the governing body. • Responsibilities are included in orientation packets for new employees, governing body and other reviewing body members.
The community has a method to track development projects.	• The community demonstrates they have and use a tracking mechanism for development projects.
The community annually reviews the fee schedule.	• The fee schedule is updated to cover the community's true cost to provide services.

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Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
A "Guide to Development" is maintained online that explains policies, procedures and steps to obtain approvals.	- The guide includes: - Relevant contact information - Relevant meeting schedules - Easy to follow step-by-step flowchart of development processes - Clear approval timelines for reviewing bodies - Conceptual meeting procedures - Relevant ordinances to review prior to site plan submission - Site plan review requirements and application - Rezoning request process and application - Variance request process and application - Special land use request process and application - Schedule of fees for variance, rezoning, special use, etc. - Special meeting procedures - Financial assistance tools - Design guidelines and related processes, if applicable - Clear explanation for site plans that can be reviewed and approved administratively, if applicable - Permit requirements and applications - Instructions for online forms - Online payment option, if applicable

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3.2 – Site Plan Review Procedures

This best practice evaluates the community's site plan review procedures and internal/external communication.

The purpose of the site plan review process is to assure plans for specific types of development comply with local ordinances and are consistent with the master plan. Site plan review procedures and review timelines should be communicated in a clear and concise manner to prospective developers and business owners. To do this sound internal procedures need to be in place and followed. Offering conceptual site plan review meetings is one more step a community can take to show investors they are working to remove redevelopment barriers and cut down on unexpected time delays.

Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
The community has a qualified intake professional or project manager.	- The community identifies a project point person and trains staff to perform intake responsibilities including: - Receiving and processing applications and site plans - Maintaining contact with the applicant - Facilitating meetings - Processing applications after approval - The designated person displays excellent customer service.
The community has a clearly documented internal staff review policy.	The review process articulates clear roles and responsibilities for the internal staff review. This may include consultants, if applicable.
The community defines and offers conceptual site plan review meetings for applicants.	The community has clearly defined expectations posted online and an internal requirements checklist to be reviewed at conceptual meetings.
The community encourages a developer to seek input from neighboring residents and businesses at the onset of the application process.	The community assists the developer in soliciting input on a proposal before site plan approval.

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Evaluation Criteria	Expectations

The appropriate departments engage in joint site plan team reviews.	• The joint site plan team review consists of the following representatives:
	
	   o Planning Department
	   o Economic Development
	   o Department of Public Works
	   o Building Department
	   o Transportation Department
	   o Fire
	   o Police
	   o Community Manager or Supervisor
	   o County, if applicable

The community promptly acts on special land use, variance or rezoning requests.	• The community follows its documented procedures and timelines.
The community annually reviews the successes and challenges with the site plan review procedures.	• The site plan review team meets to capture lessons learned and amend the process accordingly. • The community obtains customer feedback on the site plan approval process and integrates changes to the process where applicable.

4.1 – Training for Elected Officials, Board Members, and Staff

This best practice assesses how a community encourages training and tracks training needs for appointed or elected officials, board members and staff.

Planning commissioners, zoning board of appeals members, the governing body and staff make more informed decisions about redevelopment and financial incentives when they receive adequate training on land use and redevelopment issues. Turnover in officials and staff can create gaps in knowledge about key development issues, which makes ongoing training essential to the efficient functioning of a community's redevelopment processes.

Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
The community has a dedicated source of funding for training.	• The community demonstrates it has a training budget allocated for elected and appointed officials including: o Planning commission o Zoning board of appeals o Governing body o Other boards and commissions • Training budgets allocated for community staff including: o Planning o Building o Economic development
The community identifies training needs of the governing body, boards, commissions and staff based on the stated goals in the redevelopment strategy.	• The community manages a simple tracking mechanism for logging individual training needs and date of attendance.
The community encourages board and commission members to attend trainings.	• The community consistently notifies its elected and appointed officials about training opportunities.
The planning commission, zoning board of appeals and the governing body conducts collaborative study sessions.	• Community officials annually conduct review meetings about the master plan, zoning or redevelopment projects.

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4.2 – Recruitment and Orientation

This best practice evaluates how a community conducts recruitment and orientation for newly appointed or elected officials and board members.

Diversity on boards and commissions can ensure a wide range of perspectives are considered when making decisions on redevelopment and financial incentives. Communities should seek desired skill sets and establish expectations prior to new officials and board members becoming active.

Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
The community sets expectations for boards and commission positions.	- The applications set expectations for the desired skill sets for an open seat and that training is an important responsibility of an official. - The board and commission applications are accessible online.
The community provides orientation packets to newly appointed and elected members.	The orientation packet for the governing body, planning commission and zoning board of appeals includes planning, zoning and redevelopment information.

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5.1 – Redevelopment Ready Sites

This best practice assesses how a community identifies, visions and markets their priority redevelopment sites.

Identified redevelopment ready sites assist a community to stimulate the real estate market for obsolete, vacant and underutilized property. Developers look to invest in communities that have a vision for the community, and a vision for priority sites. A community which takes steps to reduce the risk of rejected (re)development proposals will entice hesitant developers to spend their time and financial resources pursuing a project in their community. To encourage redevelopment, it is essential that communities actively package and market sites prioritized for redevelopment.

Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
The community identifies and prioritizes individual redevelopment sites.	• The community maintains an updated list of high priority sites to be redeveloped. • The community uses an internal checklist to evaluate the attributes of each identified site. • The prioritized list of redevelopment sites is accessible online.

The community forms a steering committee(s) for prioritized redevelopment sites.	• The steering committee consists of:
	   o Community leaders
	   o Property owners
	   o Planning and economic development staff
	   o Other key stakeholders
	
	• The steering committee creates an action plan for the visioning and information gathering of the identified priority redevelopment sites.
	
	• The steering committee creates a marketing plan for the identified priority redevelopment sites.

The steering committee gathers preliminary development research for prioritized redevelopment sites.	• Information to consider:
	   o Market analysis or feasibility study
	   o Existing structure and previous uses report
	   o Known environmental and/or contamination conditions
	   o Soil conditions
	   o Natural features map
	   o GIS information including site location, street maps and utility locations.
	
	• The steering committee identifies community advocates for the project.

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Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
A public visioning session is held for the prioritized redevelopment sites.	• A public visioning session(s) is conducted following the community's public participation plan. • A written vision statement, including desired development outcomes and specific development criteria is created after the visioning session(s).
Available resources for the prioritized redevelopment sites are identified.	• The community determines the level of support it will give to a project depending on what desired development outcomes and criteria are met. • The community gathers financial support from other partners for projects including: o Development Authorities o Chamber of Commerce o Land Bank o Private Funders o State Agencies o Others
A "Property Information Package" for the prioritized redevelopment site(s) is assembled.	• The "Property Information Package" includes or identifies: o Vision statement and any specific required development criteria o Property survey o GIS information including site location and street maps o Water, sewer, broadband and other utility locations, capacities, and contact information o Property tax assessment information o Current or future zoning o Deed restrictions o Existing building condition report o Previous uses o Traffic studies o Known environmental and/or contamination conditions o Soil conditions and natural features map o Current property owner o Market analysis or feasibility study results o Demographic data, at community and block group levels o Available financial incentives
Prioritized redevelopment sites are actively marketed.	• The marketing plan developed by the steering committee is followed. • The "Property Information Package(s)" are accessible online.

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6.1 – Economic Development Strategy

This best practice assesses what goals and actions a community has identified to assist in strengthening its overall economic health.

Today, economic development means more than business attraction and retention. While business development is a core value, a community needs to include community development and talent in the overall equation for economic success. The goal of the economic development strategy is to provide initiatives and methods that will encourage diversity of the region's economic base, tap into opportunities for economic expansion, and help to create a sustainable, vibrant community.

Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
The governing body has approved an economic development strategy.	- The economic development strategy is part of the master plan or a separate document. - The economic development strategy connects to the master plan and capital improvement plan. - The economic development strategy identifies the unique economic opportunities and challenges of the community. - The economic development strategy identifies a 2-5 year timeline that includes priority economic development projects and implementation benchmarks. - The economic development strategy identifies the primary economic development tools the community is willing to use and negotiate. - The community demonstrates it has attempted to hit the stated benchmarks and annually reports on its progress. - The economic development strategy coordinates with a regional economic development strategy, if applicable. - The economic development strategy is accessible online.
The governing body annually reviews the economic development strategy.	- The annual budget coordinates with the economic development strategy. - The community annually reports on economic development strategy benchmarks and amends the strategy as needed.

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6.2 – Marketing and Promotion

This best practice assesses how a community promotes and markets itself to create community pride and increase investor confidence. It also evaluates the ease of locating pertinent planning, zoning, and economic development documents on the community's website.

Evaluation Criteria	Expectations
The community has developed a marketing strategy.	• The marketing strategy identifies marketing opportunities and specific strategies to attract businesses, consumers and real estate development to the community. • The marketing strategy objectives strive to create or strengthen an image for the community, heighten awareness about the community, and attract and retain businesses. • The marketing strategy includes specific approaches to market the community's prioritized redevelopment sites. • The marketing strategy is accessible online.

The community has an updated, user friendly municipal website.	• The community's website is easy to navigate and find information.
	
	• The community's redevelopment information is grouped together.
	
	• The community's website contains or links to the following information:
	    o Master plan and amendments
	    o Capital improvement plan
	    o Downtown development plan, if applicable
	    o Corridor improvement plan, if applicable
	    o Zoning ordinance
	    o All components listed in the "Guide to Development"
	    o Board and commission applications
	    o Prioritized list of redevelopment sites
	    o "Property Information Packages" for the identified priority redevelopment site(s)
	    o Economic development strategy
	    o Marketing strategy

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