



PLANNING AND ZONING TOOLKIT FOR INCLUSIVE DESIGN



About the Michigan Association of Planning

INFORMATION | EDUCATION | ADVOCACY

- 501 C 3 Nonprofit Membership Organization established in 1945
- A Chapter of the American Planning Association
- 4,000 + members
 - 1,000 APA professional planners, students, faculty
 - 3,000 Chapter Only elected and appointed officials





About Disability Networks Michigan

INFORMATION | EDUCATION | ADVOCACY

- 15 Centers For Independent Living (CILs) serving the entire state
- The first CIL in Michigan was established in Ann Arbor in 1976.
- Unified network dedicated to empowering individuals with disabilities and assisting businesses in embracing inclusivity.
- Our Impact:
 - Changing Lives and Communities | Full Participation | Equity in Opportunity | Economic Self-Sufficiency | Legislative Policies



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Our Partner





Thank you to Advisory Committee

Chad D. Bush; *Coach Road Capital*

Ron Campbell, AIA; *Oakland County Planning / Michigan Barrier Free Design Board*

Richard Carlisle, FAICP;

Carlisle | Wortman Associates, Inc.

Steve Cohen, AICP; *City of Auburn Hills*

David Esau, AIA, LEED AP; *Cornerstone Design Inc / MI Accessible Homes*

Lori James; *IIDA Michigan Chapter / SmithGroup*

Katie Jones; *City of Ypsilanti*

Jacob Kain, AICP; *City of Midland*

Claire Karner, AICP; *East Bay Charter Township*

Ryan Kilpatrick, AICP; *Flywheel Community Development Services*

Tara E McCrackin; *Kendall College of Art & Design*

Kristen Nyht, AIA, AICP, LEED AP; *Fishbeck*

Kelly Pelong; *Disability Network of Mid-Michigan*

Megan Spitz, AICP; *MSHDA*

Brigitte Wolf, AICP; *Cincar Consulting Group (C2G)*



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Zoom Tips

Technical Issues?

Contact staff

- Phone: (734) 913-2000

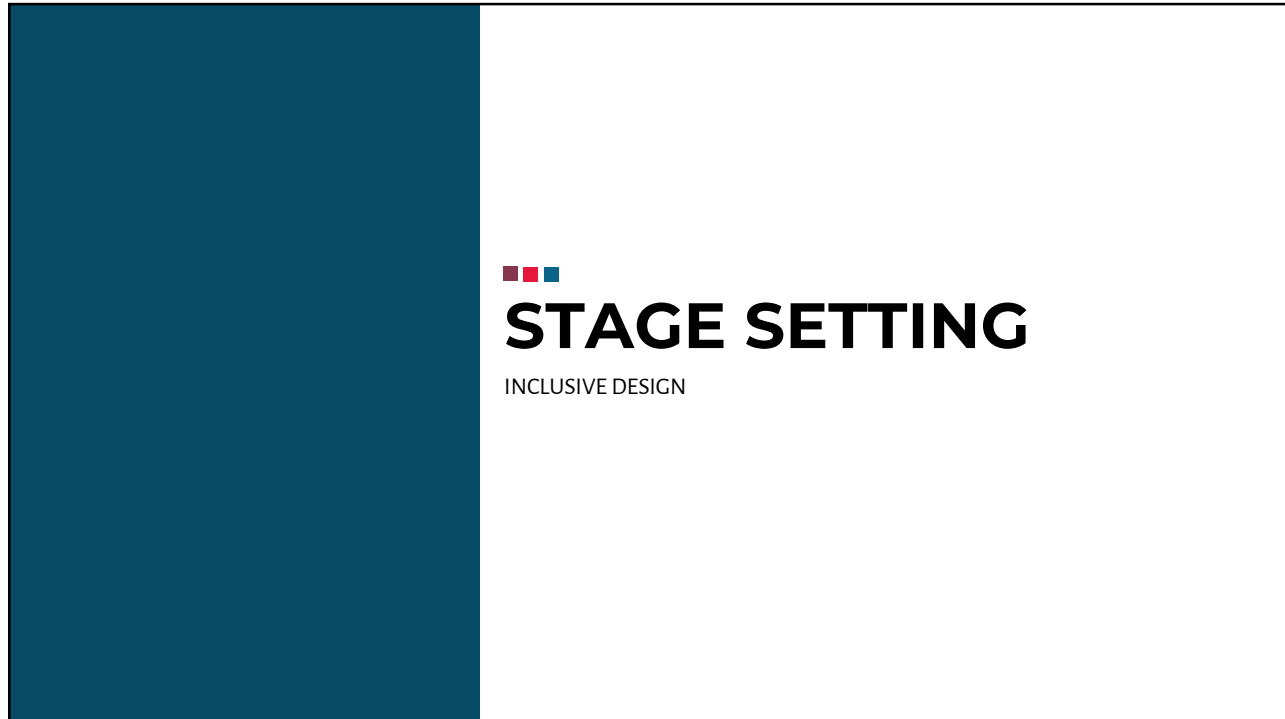
Questions for the Presenters?

We'll take them at the end

- Use the Q and A function



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Why Now?

Why this is important – it's always been important, but we are at a paradigm shift.

Why this project now – The market can handle one shift at a time, and now is the time for *inclusion*





**1 in 4 people will experience a disability in their lifetime.
But, less than 1% of U.S. housing readily accessible
to those with mobility challenges.**

Poverty Rate: 2x
higher for disabled
residents (21.6% vs
10%)

Wage Gap: 74 cents
on the dollar

Housing Insecurity:
40% for renters
with disabilities



Legal Stage Setting

Michigan Construction Code

- International Construction Code

Federal Roots





- Fair housing Act – Accessibility Guidelines
- Uniform Federal accessibility Standards (UFAS)
- ADA

“The ADA is the worst you can legally do”.





Moving Beyond Compliance: A New Standard

Accessibility (The Minimum)	Universal Design (The Outcome)	Inclusive Design (The Process)
<p>Focus: Compliance (ADA).</p> <p>Definition: Meeting code checklists (e.g., door width, ramp slope).</p> <p>Limit: Often an afterthought, resulting in undignified "separate" entrances.</p> 	<p>Focus: Designing for All.</p> <p>Definition: Environments usable by the greatest number of people without adaptation.</p> <p>Principles: Equitable Use, Flexibility, Low Physical Effort.</p>  	<p>Focus: Designing With.</p> <p>Definition: A methodology drawing on the full range of human diversity.</p> <p>Key Insight: Involves people with disabilities in the design process to overcome bias.</p> 

The Goal: Move from checking boxes to a culture that values diverse perspectives from the start.



TOOLKIT: PLANNING

INCLUSIVE DESIGN



HOW DOES PLANNING HELP US?

PLANNING This is its general job. It's hard to think and move at the same time.
guides action. This is the thinking, then the moving.

PLANNING This is its legal job in our context. But really - zoning just tells you
guides zoning. what you can't do. It shapes forces, but those forces have to be there
 in order for it to do that. If they aren't, it doesn't matter at all what
 the zoning ordinance says.

PLANNING This is a key benefit in our context. It tells us what to put time,
guides investment. money, and capacity toward.



MASTER PLANNING

- Existing Conditions
- Goals and Objectives
- Implementation





EXISTING CONDITIONS

- Infrastructure
- Environment
- Transportation
- Community Facilities
- Housing
- Commercial/Industrial
- Demographics



DEMOGRAPHICS – U.S. Census

- Disabilities: Are the number of residents with disabilities increasing or decreasing over time? (TABLE S1810)
- Age distribution. Is the community's population aging (TABLE DP05)
- Income levels and poverty rate. (TABLE DP03)
- Household size. Are households growing or shrinking? (TABLE DP02)

www.data.census.gov/table





DEMOGRAPHICS – MSHDA Housing Data Portal

Demographics Tab:

Median household income, how many folks own a house vs rent, household size

Health and Housing Tab:

Disability by Age, Chronic Health Conditions, Poverty Rate



www.mihousingdata.org/data_portal



HOUSING

- Housing types, when built, how affordable. (*Table DPO4 and MSHDA Housing Portal*)
- How many homes are single story?
- Multi-family or apartment complexes with elevators.
- Group living arrangements
- Where is most of the barrier free housing located? Is it connected to the community with accessible transportation?

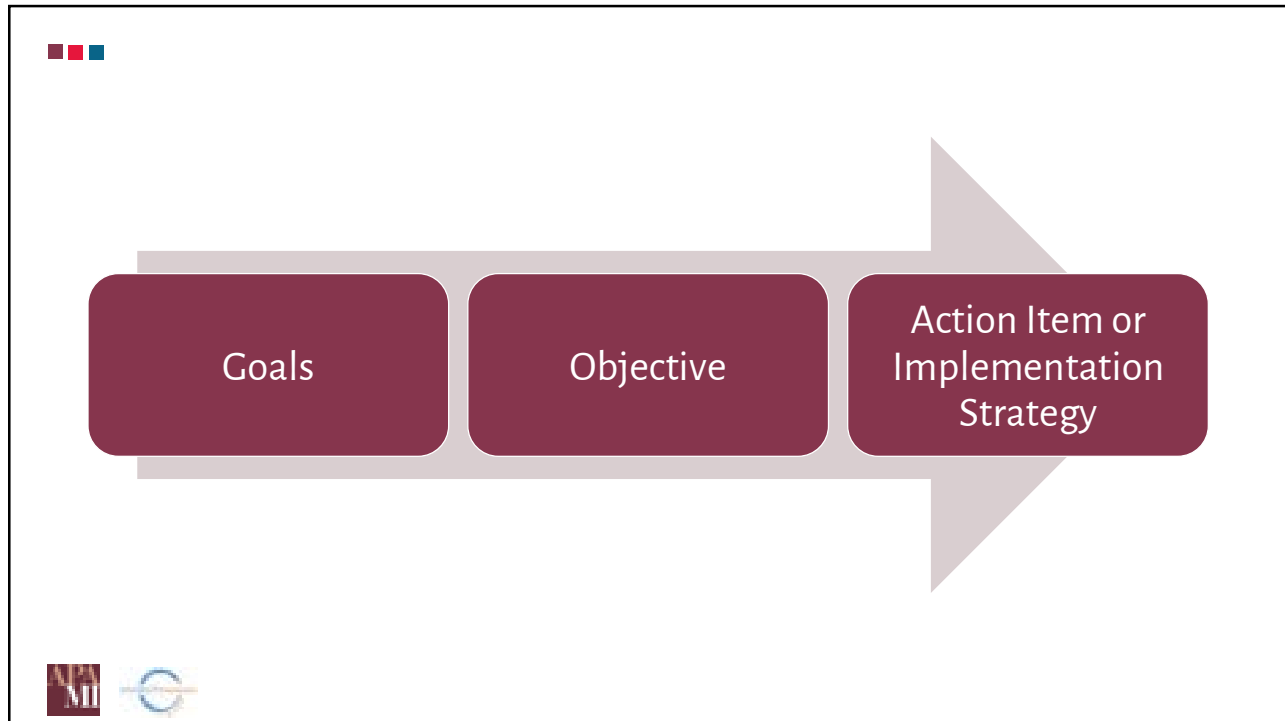




OTHER LAND USES

- Commercial /Industrial/Office
- Public Facilities (including Recreation)
- Transportation
 - Table DP04
 - Walkscore.com
 - Transportation Authority
 - Audit

Year	Total	Population
2019	334,475	100,000



GOALS

- Vibrant downtown**
- Thriving economy**
- Beautiful parks**
- Attractive neighborhoods**
- Safe streets**



OBJECTIVES

Strengthen marketing efforts to attract visitors downtown.



Encourage development where existing utilities are provided



Increase number of park activities and events .



Retain existing residents and attract new residents.

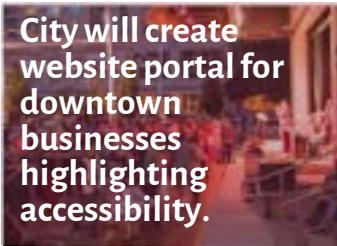


Build a non-motorized transportation network throughout the community.



ACTION OR IMPLEMENTATION ITEMS

City will create website portal for downtown businesses highlighting accessibility.



Development regulations in the growth areas will require denser development, providing easier access to jobs, services, and housing.



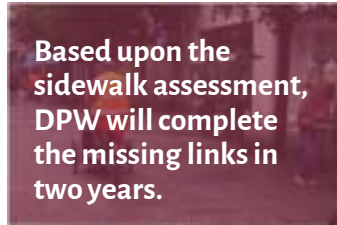
Recreation staff will work with service organizations and community groups to broaden programming.



Building department will create How to Age in Place workshop for builders and developers.



Based upon the sidewalk assessment, DPW will complete the missing links in two years.





CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLANS

Vibrant downtown



Safe streets



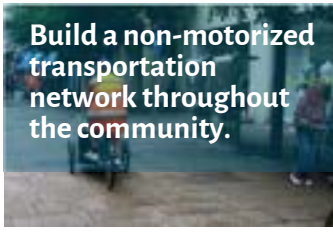
Beautiful parks



Implement Phases 1 and 2 of Wayfinding Signage Project.



Build a non-motorized transportation network throughout the community.



Replace play equipment and surfacing with accessible equipment.



PLAN ALIGNMENT



DISORDER & CONFUSION



INDIVIDUAL IMPACT
in isolation



COORDINATED IMPACT
with alignment



COLLECTIVE IMPACT
with collaborative action





PLAN ALIGNMENT



CASE STUDY: CITY OF MIDLAND



“

Community
Vision Statement

Midland:
An inclusive community
Together. Forward. Bold.
An exceptional place where
everyone thrives.

”

“

**City of Midland
Mission Statement**

That the inhabitants of the City of
Midland may live well through the
effective maintenance of **public
safety, health, and welfare** via
efficient provision of **public services,
activities, and enterprises** which
reflect intelligent opinion as to the
needs of the community.

”



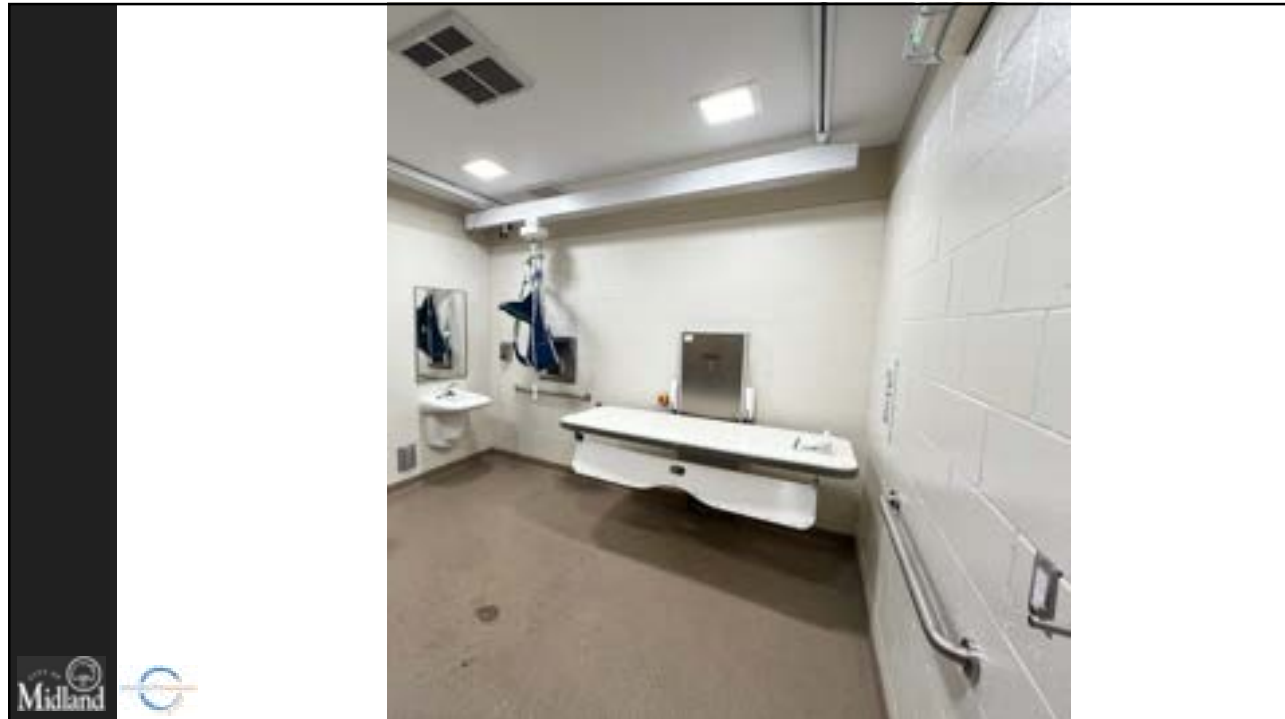
Consider the needs of all ages and abilities in City planning and programming.

- Incorporate universal design principles into public projects and encourage universal design for private projects.
- Utilize Disability Network of Mid-Michigan as a resource to provide input and expertise on new projects.









Takeaways

- Input from impacted stakeholders is key
- Modest additional cost for major impact
- Enjoyed by all, not just those with disabilities
- Supports business and tourism
- Has inspired further action

“We are not just using the word inclusion; we are really becoming inclusive. And a truly inclusive community means creating spaces that allow everyone to take care of their needs.”



TOOLKIT: ZONING

INCLUSIVE DESIGN



DEFINITION OF FAMILY

- Biased Perceptions and Restrictive Definitions
- Legal (and Ethical) Risk for Municipalities
- Separate Nuisance Regulations
- Consider Economic and Social Drivers



DEFINITION OF GROUP HOMES

- State –licensed residential care facilities
- Not all households that appear to be residential facilities are state licensed
- Michigan law is clear that households of similar size, regardless of the composition of the household, must be treated similarly by the zoning ordinance
- A municipality should be consistent with its definitions and regulations of group homes, regardless of whether or not the home is state licensed.
- Given the wide variety of group or congregate living homes a community may need to include, thoughtful planning as well as zoning and other regulations are needed

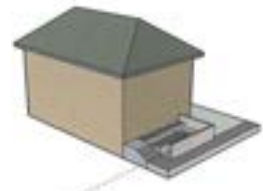
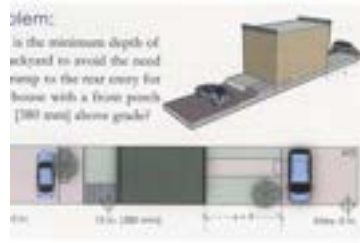




ENCROACHMENTS IN THE FRONT YARD

- Zoning says what an encroach into a required yard
- Stairs (or ramps) are often not included in the list of allowable encroachments
- Up to interpretation
- Update the ordinance to ensure that stairs and ramps are allowed to be in the required front yard

EXAMPLES: City of Flint | City of Grand Rapids | City of Ypsilanti



DENSITY



MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

- Higher density housing, near jobs, services and transportation
- Smaller units reduce per-unit costs
- Accessibility requirements vary with applicable building code
- Consider education and incentives to encourage more accessible housing



MINIMUM DWELLING, LOT WIDTH AND AREA



Large lots drive higher home prices



Smaller homes reduce construction costs, but they need to be on smaller lots



Ordinance reform enables affordability



Consider education and incentives to encourage more accessible housing





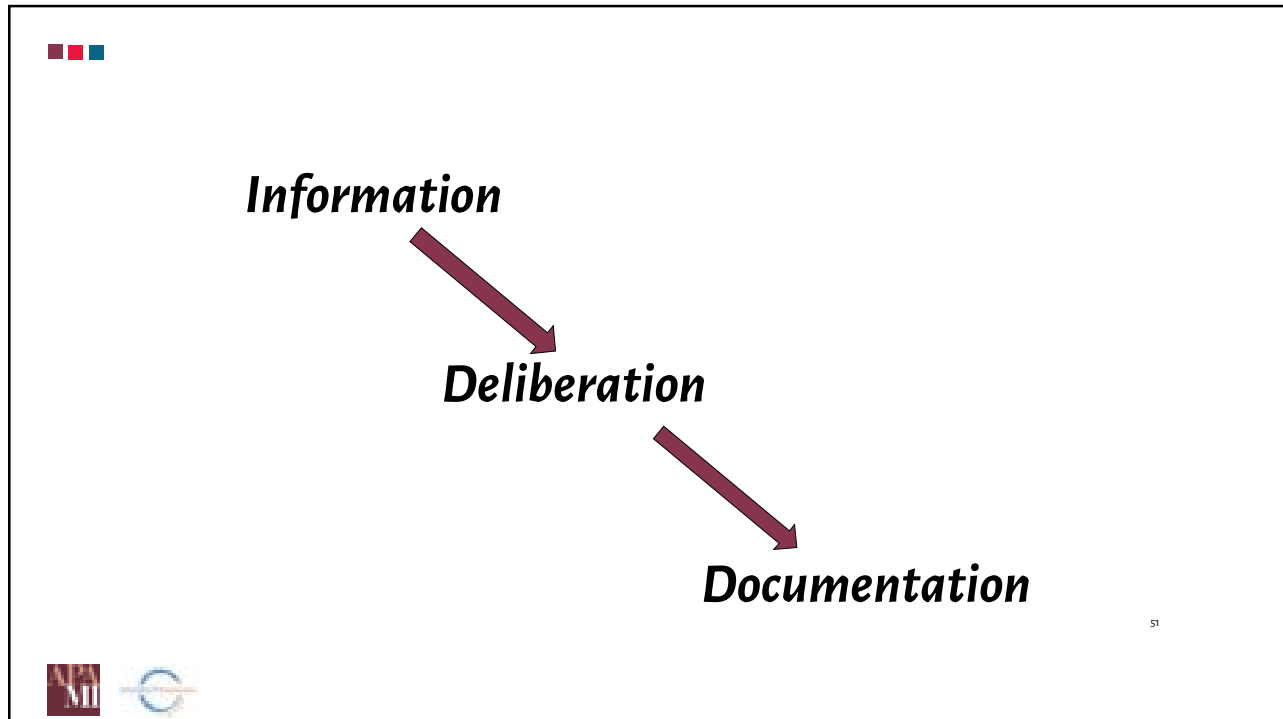
MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS

- Parking minimums increase housing costs
- Parking consumes land that could be used for other uses
- Car dependence reduces access to businesses and services



PROCESSES





PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT

- PUDs are supposed to trade existing zoning for something better.
- What is better?
- PUDs are an opportunity to require accessibility in excess of what state and federal law require.



VARIANCES

- Variances allow relief from zoning rules
- But if the request is because of a disability, federal law prohibits municipalities from making any land use decision that discriminates against protected persons.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act requires reasonable, necessary modifications
- Often this procedure is not outlined in an ordinance.
- **Better practice:** develop and adopt an ordinance and procedure that outlines the different standards and when they apply.

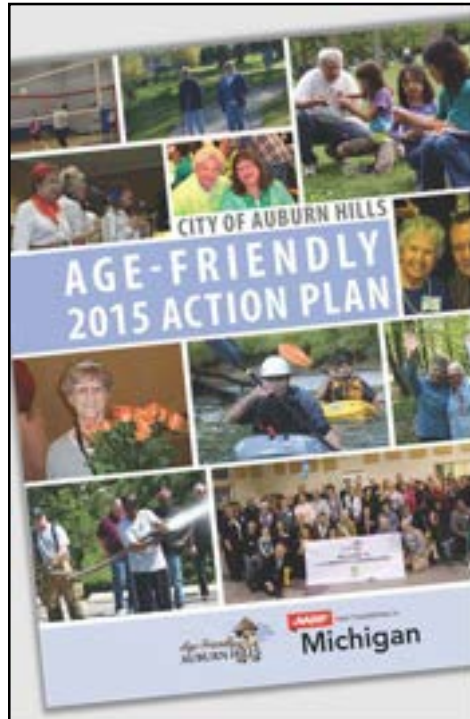


PRE-APPROVED PLANS

- Developed by or approved by the municipal authority in advance
- Plans adhere to building codes
- Expedite process and ensure design meets community priorities

EXAMPLES: Disability Network Michigan Pattern Book | MEDC | MML | City of Ecorse | City of Kalamazoo





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CASE STUDY: CITY OF AUBURN HILLS



CITY OF AUBURN HILLS

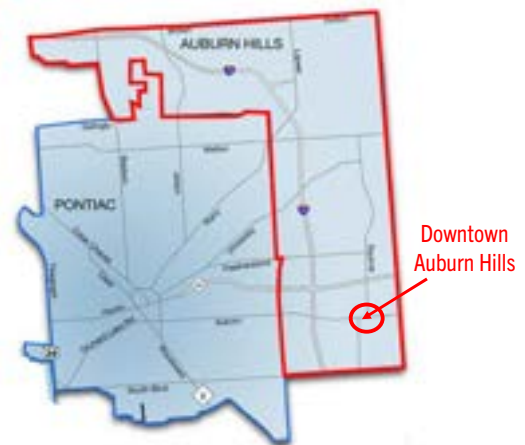
Incorporated on December 31, 1983
(formerly Pontiac Township)

"A community with the heart of a small town that operates with the excellence of a world-class city."

17.5 square miles

26,000 population

- Global Business Address
- Oakland University and Oakland Community College
- Great Lakes Crossing Outlets



OUR COMMUNITY



AGE-FRIENDLY AUBURN HILLS (2013-present)

PUBLIC INPUT



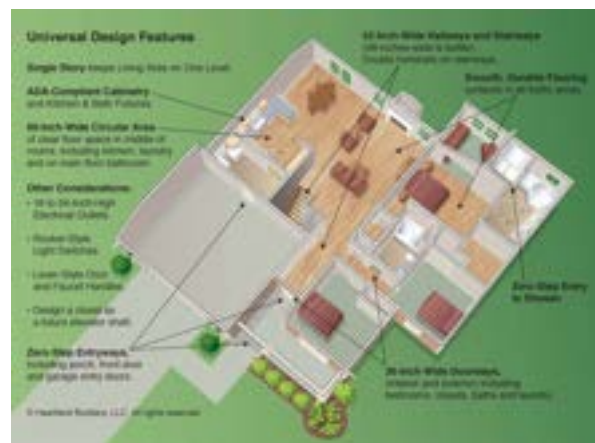
RESIDENTS WANT HOUSING OPTIONS FOR ALL ABILITIES AND LIFE STAGES



UNIVERSAL DESIGN ORDINANCE (2017)

At least 75% of the homes within a project must have the minimum universal design elements and features to be considered for PUD eligibility.

1. Zero-step front door entryway
2. First-floor master bedroom and bathroom with zero-step entry to the shower
3. Three-foot-wide doorways and Three-and-a-half-foot-wide hallways
4. Five-foot-wide maneuvering radius in the kitchen and bathrooms
5. First-floor laundry room



IMPLEMENTATION



IMPLEMENTATION

WINS ... AGE-FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOODS

(2016) Villa Montclair PUD – 88 detached single-family homes (project complete)



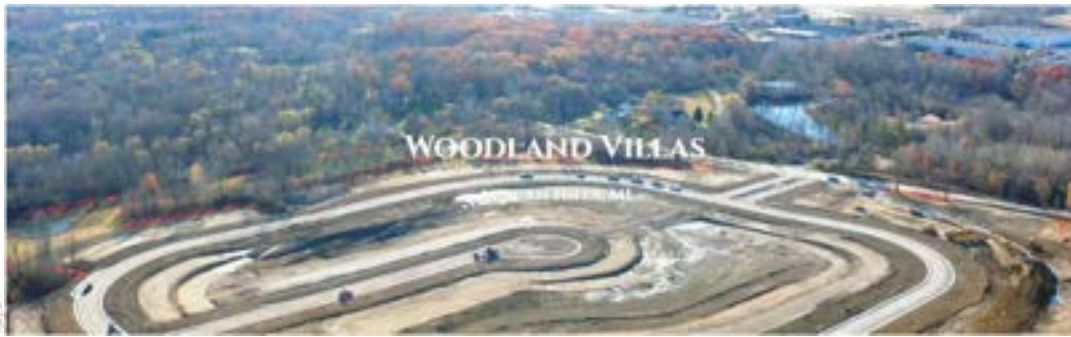
(2018) Sumerlyn PUD – 36 detached single-family homes (project complete)



IMPLEMENTATION

WINS ... AGE-FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOODS

(2019) Woodland Villas PUD – 113 detached single-family homes (housing construction just starting)





WIN – homes with 1st floor living

IMPLEMENTATION

HOUSE PLAN OPTION #1

OPTIONAL SECOND FLOOR PLAN

OPTIONAL PORCH

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

FIRST FLOOR LIVING FT. 1,011 SECOND FLOOR AREA 1,011 TOTAL 2,022 FT. FINISH LEVEL 1.00



CHALLENGE – zero step entry

IMPLEMENTATION

(2016) Villa Montclair PUD – 88 detached single-family homes



3-step entry

2 steps to the porch, plus 1 step from the porch into the home



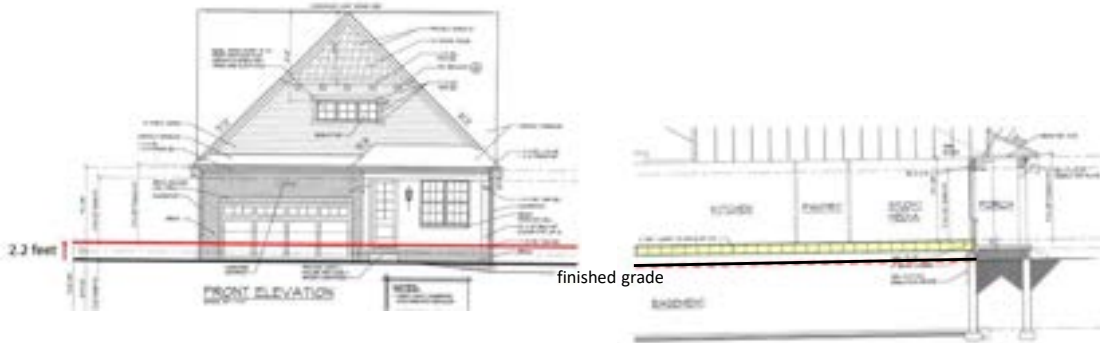
2-step entry

1 step to the porch, plus 1 step from the porch into the home



CHALLENGES with zero step entry

Raised houses are a byproduct of basements.



The first floor is 2.2 feet above the finished grade because the house sits on a full basement, and the **foundation height, floor structure, and basement waterproofing requirements** all “stack up.”



CHALLENGES with zero step entry

The required rise-to-run ratio for ADA ramps is 1:12.

- For every 1-inch rise, a home would need 12 inches (1 foot) of ramp.
- For example, if the steps to a home’s entryway are 27 inches high, you will need a ramp that is at least 27 feet long.



Photo credit: COR Freedom



CHALLENGES with zero step entry

Does the ramp entry to the home have to comply with ADA requirements?

If not, what standard do you apply to a home? No clear standard beyond ADA.

- No handrails? No landings? No edge protection? Potential lawsuit?



(2018) Sumerlyn PUD

Example - Not enough room in the front yard to meet the ADA rise-to-run standard.



POTENTIAL SOLUTION to achieve zero step entry

Drop Floor System involves installing floor joists lower than the top of the foundation wall, typically using a ledger or specialized hangers, to create a flush, ground-level entry and reduce the need for steps.



Reverse Ledge Detail

Source Credit: Designed Happy



Example

Source Credit: Chad D. Bush, Coach Road Capital



WRAP-UP

AUBURN HILLS' EXPERIENCE

1. **Achieved the community's goal of adding "Age-Friendly" homes to the community by incentivizing developers via the Planned Unit Development Option.**
2. **Zero-step front door entryways/ramps have been elusive**
 - Building construction techniques, site grading, and code requirements have made it impractical to achieve.
 - No two sites are the same in terms of elevation, space, parcel size, etc.
 - Plan to work with builders to commit to a "drop floor system" at the time of project approval.
3. **We plan to re-evaluate our 2017 Universal Design Ordinance and take another look at the required benchmarks.**



TOOLKIT: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

INCLUSIVE DESIGN



“Why are we talking about community engagement?”

Two questions for you:

1. **Why** do we conduct community engagement?
2. **If** we actively excluded a quarter of the population from the start, do we meet those goals?



The Minimums

Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 276)

- Meetings must be open to observers
- Advance public notice required
- Minutes recorded and available

Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA) (PA 33)

- At least one public hearing is required before adoption or amendment of a master plan
- Draft plans available for review
- 15 days notice for hearing

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

- Meetings must take place in physically accessible spaces.
- Must provide American Sign Language interpreters or captioning upon request.
- Communities must ensure that all digital platforms used are screen-reader compatible

Q: Are these minimums enough?

A: No. Legal minimums often fall short of true inclusivity. Why?





Where the Minimum Lacks: Providing Accessibility Beyond the Physical Building

- Meeting room has space for wheelchair users to sit **with** the group (not off to the side)
- Parking lot includes legally designated accessible spaces **that are not impeded**
- Sidewalks and crosswalks are safe and present
 - Free from snow, debris, etc.



Important: Always visit the venue in person to assess accessibility firsthand.



Where the Minimum Lacks: Designing for Readability (Notices)



The differences (and the basic guidelines):

Contrast: Black on White or high-contrast equivalents only.

Typography: Sans-serif fonts (Arial, Montserrat). **Minimum** 10-point word sizes.

Layout: Use headers, bullets, and white space. Do not crowd text.





Simple Tools and Resources: Contrast: WebAIM Contrast Checker

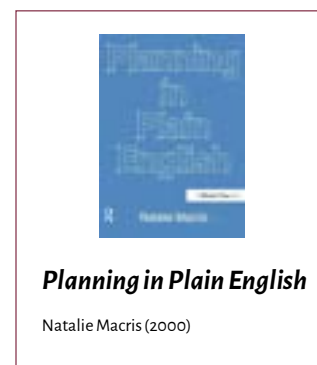
<https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>

The screenshot displays the WebAIM Contrast Checker interface. It features two side-by-side tool panels. The left panel shows a sample image of a 'NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING' document with a contrast ratio of 3.94:1. The right panel shows a sample image of a 'ZONING NOTICE' document with a contrast ratio of 14.08:1. Below each image, there are sections for 'Normal Text', 'Large Text', and 'Graphical Objects and User Interface Components'. The 'Normal Text' and 'Large Text' sections show the text 'The five boxing wizards jump quickly' in different colors and sizes. The 'Graphical Objects and User Interface Components' section shows a 'Text Input' field with a star icon. The 'ZONING NOTICE' sample shows a much higher contrast ratio and more legible text compared to the 'NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING' sample.



Where the Minimum Lacks: Designing for Readability (Writing like a human, not a memo)

- Keep it **simple**
 - “Sidewalks and crosswalks” vs. “pedestrian infrastructure”
 - “We want your ideas” vs. “we are soliciting public input”
- **Lead with the point:** don’t bury the key message
 - 3 paragraphs of explanation vs. “We’re making the intersection safer”
- Provide **clear outcomes**
 - “You told us X. We’re doing Y.”





The Impact of True Inclusion vs. Legal Compliance

- Representation of all voices
- Outcomes that address real needs
- Improved community trust



Two Takeaways

1. Your stakeholder engagement list should include disabled people, disability organizations, and caregivers.
2. The minimums with engagement are just **minimums**, go beyond them.





Resources

- [American Planning Association: An Equitable Approach to Zoning Notifications \(2024\)](#)
- [WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool](#)
- [Fact Sheet: New Rule on the Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Apps Provided by State and Local Governments](#)
- [Harvard Digital Accessibility Services: Hosting Accessible Remote Meetings and Events](#)
- [W3C: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1 \(2025\)](#)



CASE STUDY: CITY OF ESCORSE





What is Pre-Approved Housing?

Housing construction plans that are **prepared and released by a municipality for free** or low-cost use by the public. They are designed to:

- Fit the average lot.
- Meet all current zoning codes and building standards.
- Be used by either developers or individual homeowners.
- And ideally, be **fully accessible!**

Goal: reduce the cost and increase the speed of housing construction.



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Where is Pre-Approved Housing Appropriate?

GROWTH MARKET	TRANSITION MARKET	REVITALIZATION MARKET
Places that have a strong and diverse economic base, a population that is growing at a stable rate, and high home values due to consistent demand.	Places that can support basic infrastructure and public service costs and are currently recovering from a history of population decline. The commercial and residential markets in these areas are starting to diversify and strengthen.	Places that do not have enough population to support infrastructure and public service costs and need substantial efforts to start revitalization. This is the ideal market for pre-approved housing plans.



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Revitalization Market

- 1) Reduce or eliminate **parking**
- 2) Allow for a **wider range of housing** types
- 3) Expand **administrative approval**
- 4) Take a flexible approach to **non-conformities**
- 5) Reduce or eliminate minimum **dwelling unit size**
- 6) **Pre-approved housing plans**



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The Steps to Develop Accessible Plans

- 1) Assess your lot sizes and dimensional restrictions.
- 2) Decide on the number of house size(s) and layouts to be offered.
- 3) Decide on whether levels of finish will be offered.
- 4) **Decide on accessibility requirements.**
- 5) Set up internal working team (staff, local officials, local developer, etc.) and review the RFP.
- 6) Issue RFP.
- 7) Choose home designer and work with them to create the final plans.



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Review Outdoor Accessibility

Here are just a few things to consider on the exterior of the home when working with the home designer:

- No-step barrier-free entry.
- Ranch layout.
- Lever handles for doors.
- Minimum 36-in doorways and 48-in hallways.
- Less than ¼-in thresholds.

Note: You can always require the designer to be Certified Aging in Place (CAPS) certified.



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Review Indoor Accessibility



Things to consider on the interior of the home when working with the home designer: **Universal Design!**

- Open space under skinks and cooktops.
- Multi-height counters.
- Lever faucets and handles.
- No-step inset shower.
- Pre-installed blocking for future grab-bars.
- Switches 48-in off ground.
- Outlets 24-in off ground.

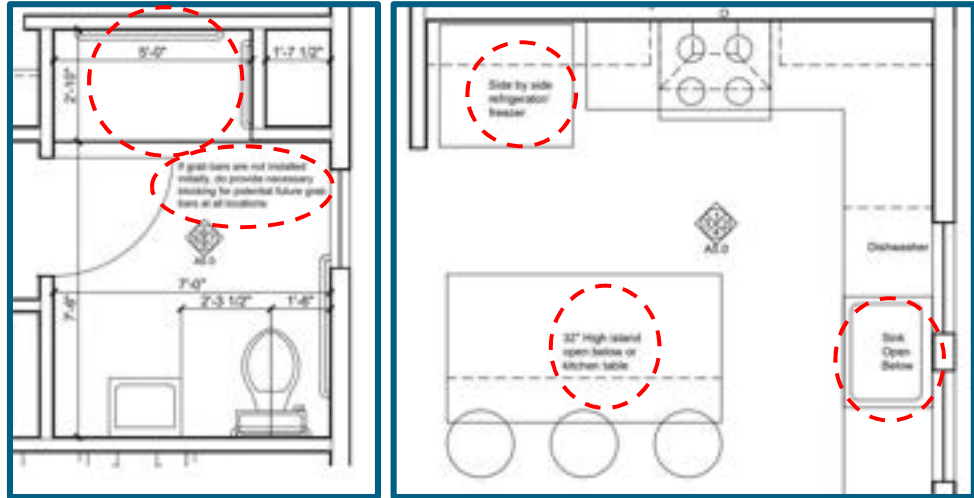


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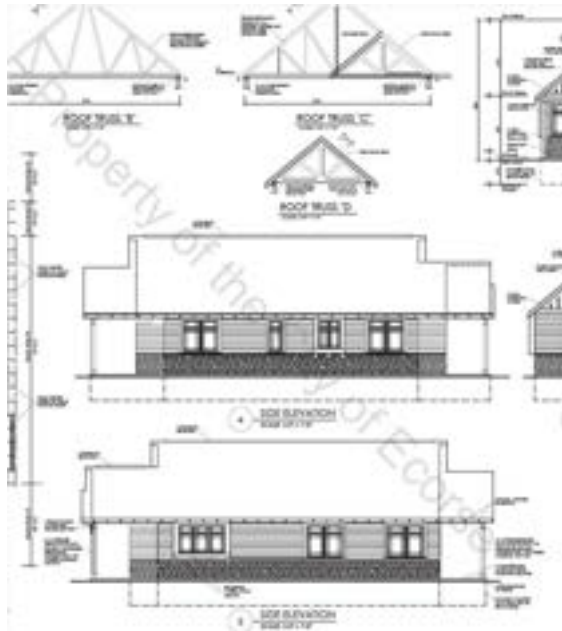


Univerisal Design in MML's Pattern Book

The Michigan Municipal League (MML) has released their own home drawings. Instead of making the home plans fit the zoning, instead you **make the zoning fit the home plans**. Designed for a 100 ft by 50 ft Lot, offering Duplex and Fourplex options.



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Takeaways from Ecorse

- **Bake universal design into housing designs.**
- **Partner where you can** with land banks, developers, etc.
- **Assume the hardest lot** make your plans for the smallest/narrowest parcel, then move on upward to the biggest.
- **Incentivize plan use** through reduced permit fees and free plans.
- **Make lots buildable** by allowing construction on lots of record or reducing minimum lot sizes .
- **Train your staff early.**



Please feel free to email me: nwolf@azdda.org

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NEXT STEPS FOR INCLUSIVE DESIGN



The Foundation: Leadership and Coalitions

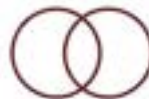
1. It Starts at Home



Municipal officials must lead by example to establish the foundation. Internal buy-in reinforces the "WHY" of inclusive design, preparing staff to act as public ambassadors.

Goal: Shift from a culture of apathy to deep commitment.

2. Identify Allies



Look for partners who share values or hold influence: disability advocates, senior citizens, schools, and local businesses. Educate teams about the specific challenges and "lived experiences" of those they support.

3. Organize Supporters



The Municipality serves as the central coordinating entity. Create regular opportunities to meet, engage, and lead collaborative projects.

Action: Maintain a cadre of local advocates to champion priorities.





The Mechanism: Targeted Training & Capacity Building

PROFESSIONAL PLANNERS & STAFF

- Focus on technical rigor, master planning, and writing codes.
- Introduction to "Planning and Zoning for Inclusive Design".

DEVELOPERS, ARCHITECTS, BUILDERS

- Focus on business cases for inclusiveness.
- Fair Housing Act/ADA training.
- Universal Design principles that move past minimum requirements.

COMMUNITY ADVOCATES

- Focus on empathy and Lived Experience.
- Includes walkabouts, focus groups, and using personal stories to test policy recommendations.

OFFICIALS

- Focus on values, legal frameworks (ADA), and policy/management.
- Emphasizes the moral imperative and community benefits.



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The Strategic Roadmap: From Pilot to Policy



- Community Building Meetings
- Test Pilot Experiences & Walking/Rolling Tours
- Development of How-to Guides for engaging persons with disabilities in planning
- **Mobility:** Guidelines for inclusive signage, wayfinding, and transportation
- **Public Investment:** Procurement of devices (e.g., track chairs, fishing piers)
- **Housing:** Educational home assessment components and pre-approved plans for remodel/renovation
- **State Legislation:** Revisions to the Open Meetings Act (mandating virtual participation options) and Elevator reform
- **Zoning Mandates:** 'Use by Right' mandates for Missing Middle inclusive design (zero step entrances, reinforced bathroom walls)



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Moving Forward: Leadership and Implementation

Educate

Learn the vocabulary and technical skills to update master plans.

Partner

Actively partner with the disability community (Designing With).

Advocate

Push for long-term state reforms to resolve the conflict between Planning Acts and Construction Codes



February 25 webinar

Menu


- LEARNING THROUGH SURVEYS AND WORKSHOPS
- DESIGNING AROUND HOLEPUPS, FLOOR CLEARANCES
- ELECTRICAL AND WIRE ACCESS CONSIDERATIONS
- MOUNTING HEIGHTS AND DISTANCES IN KITCHENS
- MOUNTING HEIGHTS AND DISTANCES IN BATHROOMS
- ZERO-STEP SHOWER CONSIDERATIONS
- WELL-BEING AND ACCESSIBLE BLDGS
- PRODUCT FEATURES





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info@planningmi.org

www.planningmi.org


Questions?





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