Redevelopment Ready Communities®
Community Assessment Report

City of Ann Arbor
Evaluation Findings

October 2014

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Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) is a certification program supporting community revitalization and the attraction and retention of businesses, entrepreneurs and talent throughout Michigan. RRC promotes communities to be development ready and competitive in today's economy by actively engaging stakeholders and proactively planning for the future — making them more attractive for investments that create places where people want to live, work and play.

In January 2013, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) announced the first open application round for communities interested in achieving RRC certification. MEDC received submissions from 36 communities across the state. Ann Arbor's application scored in the top eight and was selected to receive a full RRC assessment. We applaud the city's efforts in working to achieve RRC certification. The foundation of the evaluation is the RRC Best Practices. Developed by experts in the public and private sector, the best practices are the standard to achieve certification and designed to create a predictable experience for investors, businesses and residents working within a community. Communities must demonstrate that all best practice evaluation criteria have been met to receive RRC certification. While the report of findings outlines recommended actions to meet each best practice criteria, the city may choose its own path of alternate strategies as long as the required criteria is being accomplished.

Ann Arbor is the 14th community to be evaluated under the statewide RRC program and well on its way to becoming redevelopment ready. In 2009, the city adopted a citizen participation ordinance requiring all new developments reach out to the surrounding neighborhoods before submitting an application. This process allows developers to gain constructive comments on projects so they can potentially gain local support and the planning commission can consider them in their decision making. The city is also encouraging the type of development that they desire by allowing premiums in normal maximum usable floor coverage area and height for developments in their downtown. Premiums are given for such development that include residential, historic preservation, affordable housing, green building, pedestrian amenities, and public parking.

While the spirit of redevelopment exists, Ann Arbor needs to continue working on the zoning ordinance reorganization, create a property information package, and adopt an economic development strategy. The city also needs to review their current site plan review procedure. Currently the city requires all developments to go through a public hearing at the planning commission and city council level. Requiring multiple public hearings for site plans that comply with the city's master plan and zoning ordinance is an impediment to development.

"The planning department is extremely knowledgeable, professional and helpful."

— Tom Stegeman
Campus Reality

The basic assessment tool for evaluation is the RRC Best Practices. These six standards were developed in conjunction with public and private sector experts, and address key elements of community and economic development. A community must demonstrate all of the RRC Best Practice components have been met to become RRC certified. Once received, certification is valid for three years.

Measurement of a community to the best practices is completed through the RRC team's research, observation and interviews, as well as seeking the consulting advice and technical expertise of the RRC advisory council. The team analyzes a community's development materials, including, but not limited to: the master plan; redevelopment strategy; capital improvements plan; budget; public participation plan; zoning regulations; development procedures; applications; economic development strategy; marketing strategies; and website. Researchers observe meetings of the community's governing body, planning commission, zoning board of appeals and other committees as applicable. In confidential interviews, the team also records the input of local business owners and developers.

A community's degree of attainment for each best practice criteria is visually represented in this report by the following:

	Green indicates the best practice component is currently being met by the community.
	Yellow indicates some of the best practice component may be in place, but additional action is required.
	Red indicates the best practice component is not present or outdated.

This report represents the findings of the evaluation of the city of Ann Arbor's redevelopment processes and practices. All questions should be directed to the RRC team at RRC@michigan.org.

Best Practice 1.1—The plans

Best Practice 1.1 evaluates community planning and how the redevelopment vision is embedded into the master plan, capital improvements plan (CIP), downtown development plan and corridor plan. The master plan sets expectations of those involved in new development and redevelopment, giving the public some degree of certainty about their vision for the future while assisting the city in achieving its stated goals.

The city of Ann Arbor's master plan is comprised of nine documents that provide the framework for planning in the city. The master plan documents include the land use element, downtown plan, transportation plan, South State Street corridor plan, non-motorized plan, parks and recreation open space plan, natural features master plan and sustainability framework. These documents serve as a guide for the public and private decision makers for future development of the city.

With multiple planning documents, it is important for the city to make sure they coordinate. While each plan covers a specific area, they all emphasize similar goals such as engaging the community, integrated land uses, transportation options, and diverse housing.

The city has identified the main corridors of South State Street, Washtenaw Avenue, and North Main Street as their priority redevelopment areas. All three priority areas are emphasized in their master plan with recommendations on their future development. Additionally the city has adopted a separate corridor plan as part of the master plan for State Street Corridor. The plan includes recommended actions in relation to land use and access; community; climate and energy and resource management. The plan includes goals and actions for redevelopment as well as a prioritized implementation section.

A comprehensive CIP is an essential tool for the planning and development of the social, physical, and economic wellbeing of a community. The CIP can be used as a tool to implement the master plan and provides a link between planning and budgeting for capital projects. Ann Arbor has a comprehensive six-year CIP that coordinates with all aspects of the city and identifies the need, scope, sources of funds, how it complies with the master plan, and a schedule. The CIP is also presented online as a whole document and broken up into asset category for easy dissemination.

Ann Arbor has a comprehensive downtown plan that is part of the city's master plan, which coordinates with the DDA development plan and tax increment financing. The plans call for projects that support a mixture and diversity of uses, pedestrian friendliness, improving transit options, and infrastructure capacity.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The governing body has adopted a master plan in the past five years.	✓	
	The master plan identifies a strategy for redevelopment or a redevelopment plan.	✓	
	The governing body has adopted a capital improvements plan.	✓	
	The governing body has adopted a downtown plan.	✓	
	The governing body has adopted a corridor plan.	✓	

Best Practice 1.2—Public participation

Best Practice 1.2 assesses how well the community identifies and engages its stakeholders on a continual basis. The foundation of all planning efforts is public participation, which aims to prevent or minimize disputes by creating a process for resolving issues before they become an obstacle.

Ann Arbor adopted a citizen participation ordinance that requires all developers to gather public participation on new developments. The city has put together guides to help a developer understand the ordinance and instructions on how to satisfy the ordinance. The guides also help identify potential locations and times to achieve maximum participation at the events. Gathering this input before submitting a development proposal helps inform the public upfront of the proposal and build consensus from community stakeholders. Once the community input is gathered, the developer is required to prepare a final report to be included in the site plan for review by the planning commission and city council.

It is important to collect a variety of public input on city led initiatives. The city utilizes their citizen engagement toolkit that helps to identify key stakeholders, gives ideas on how to promote events for public input gathering and choose proper venues.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The community has a public participation plan for engaging a diverse set of community stakeholders in land use decisions.	✓	
	The community demonstrates that public participation efforts go beyond the basic methods.	✓	
	The community shares outcomes of all public participation processes.	✓	

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Best Practice 2.1—Zoning regulations

Best Practice 2.1 evaluates the city's zoning ordinance to determine how well it regulates and implements the goals of the master plan. Inflexible or obsolete zoning regulations can discourage redevelopment. Advances in technology and widespread availability of the internet calls for communities to make their zoning ordinance and other codes available online for easier public access. In some cases, interested developers may be across the state, across the country or around the world and need information at their fingertips.

The city of Ann Arbor's master plan and zoning ordinance comply in many ways. For example, the city's master plan indicates that they want to "encourage new development to reinforce historic buildings' contribution to downtowns identity and pedestrian orientation" and "Encourage the development of parks, plazas, through-block arcades and atrium spaces, emphasizing small open spaces distributed throughout downtown." The city's zoning ordinance allows for premium of up to 50 percent of the lot area allowed in excess of the normal maximum usable floor area for a development that preserves a historic resource and a premium of 10 square feet of floor area in excess of the normal maximum usable floor area for each pedestrian amenity improvement.

The zoning ordinance is available online free of charge, contains limited graphics, and a general land use matrix, but is not considered user-friendly. The city's land use and development related ordinances and regulations are scattered among 11 different chapters in the city code. In 2009, the city identified this as an issue stating, "The goal of the zoning ordinance reorganization project is to present the existing contents of the 11 development-related chapters of the city code in a more coherent, consistent, concise, and user-friendly manner." The city has held three public meetings since the issue was identified. The city should continue this process or start on another path to make their zoning ordinance user-friendly and easier to read.

It is important for a community to provide appropriate locations for concentrated development. Ann Arbor is accomplishing this by allowing a mixture

of uses "by right" in the downtown D-1 and D-2 districts as well as in some commercial districts. Additionally, the D-1 and D-2 zoning districts are a hybrid form based code allowing for few use restrictions but regulating on the height, area and placement of the buildings as well as design guidelines.

The city's zoning ordinance allows for building height and normal maximum usable floor area premiums if a building incorporates a residential use, affordable housing, green standards, historic preservation, pedestrian amenity, and public parking. These premiums help the city provide areas of concentrated development and encourage the form of development desired.

The city's master plan states that they would like to provide a full range of housing choices (size, price, design, accessibility, etc.) which meets the existing and anticipated needs of all city residents. Ann Arbors zoning ordinance allows for this by encouraging a mixture of housing options throughout the city in many ways. The city currently allows for accessory apartments in all residential districts as a special use, encourages market rate and affordable residential units in the downtown, and defines a multifamily dwelling as a building containing three or more dwelling units arranged either side by side or one above the other.

The zoning ordinance also provides for flexible parking requirements. The city does not require any parking in the downtown zoning designations for structures that do not exceed 300 percent of the lot area and has flexible requirements for structures that are larger.

Stormwater runoff is a major cause of water pollution in urban areas. Ann Arbor's code allows for alternative methods of stormwater detention in new developments. Ann Arbor also has a stormwater utility that assesses a rate to all property owners based on the usage of the stormwater system. The city offers credits to the stormwater utility bills for techniques such as rain barrels, rain gardens, cisterns, dry wells, and bioswales. Having a stormwater utility allows for the city to encourage and incentivize green infrastructure.

Best Practice 2.1—Zoning regulations *continued*

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The governing body has adopted a zoning ordinance that aligns with the goals of the current master plan.	✓	
	The zoning ordinance is easy to read and accessible online.	☐ Complete work on the zoning ordinance reorganization to make the ordinance easy to read as outlined in RRC Best Practice 2.1	12 months
	The zoning ordinance provides for areas of concentrated development in appropriate locations and encourages the type and form of development desired.	✓	
	The zoning ordinance includes flexible zoning tools to encourage development and redevelopment.	✓	
	The zoning ordinance allows for a variety of housing options.	✓	
	The zoning ordinance includes standards to improve non-motorized transportation.	✓	
	The zoning ordinance allows for flexible parking requirements.	✓	
	The zoning ordinance includes standards for green infrastructure.	✓	

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Best Practice 3.1—Site plan review policy and procedures

Best Practice 3.1 evaluates the city's site plan review policies and procedures, project tracking and internal/external communications. The purpose of the site plan review process is to ensure that plans for specific types of development comply with the zoning ordinance. Site plan review procedures and 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. Ann Arbor has multiple qualified intake professionals in the planning and development services unit. The city has internal staff procedures clearly documented for each part of the site plan review process so any staff member can easily pull a file and answer a question on a project. The city requires all developments to go through an introductory meeting with planning staff as well as a pre-submission meeting to make sure that all items in the petitioner checklist are complete.

The city uses a system named etrackit that allows a developer to submit plans and other materials electronically, eliminating the time necessary to distribute paper copies to reviewing staff. The system allows for the city staff and residents to track the development proposals and view the site plans online. This online portal allows residents, contractors and applicants to track the progress of developments. This system also tracks city staff time showing when a proposal is submitted, when it was completed and when the due date is. Tracking the progress of a development proposal review helps the city identify where holdups, if any, occur.

Having an efficient site plan review process is important to becoming redevelopment ready and can assist in attracting investment dollars to community. Currently the city requires all site plans to gather public input at the neighborhood level through the citizen participation ordinance as well as a public hearing at the planning commission level and again at the city council level. The city has already provided multiple opportunities for public input on development at this point in the process, and requiring multiple public hearings for a site plan that complies with the zoning ordinance is an impediment to development and fundamentally not "redevelopment ready". Additionally, developers interviewed for this report identified that uncertainty in site plan approval process was an impediment to development. The city council needs to eliminate the unnecessary step of the city council approving site plans that are a permitted use.

Developer and organization interviews provided input that the city has great customer service however the city does not have a mechanism to obtain customer feedback. The city should develop a customer feedback mechanism and annually review the feedback so staff can make sure any issues are corrected.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The zoning ordinance articulates a thorough site plan review process.	✓	
	The community has a qualified intake professional.	✓	
	The community defines and offers conceptual site plan review meetings for applicants.	✓	
	The community has a clearly documented internal staff review policy.	✓	

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Best Practice 3.1—Site plan review policy and procedures *continued*

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
■	The appropriate departments engage in joint site plan reviews.	✓	
■	The community has a method to track development projects.	✓	
■	The community promptly acts on development requests.	☐ Eliminate city council review of "permitted use" site plan	12 months
■	The community encourages a developer to seek input from neighboring residents and businesses at the onset of the application process.	✓	
■	The community annually reviews the successes and challenges with the site plan review and approval procedures.	☐ Create a mechanism for customer feedback as outlined in Best Practice 3.1	6 months

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Best Practice 3.2—Guide to development

Best Practice 3.2 evaluates the availability of the community's development information. Land use planning and development is a process that involves a wide range of people. For the process to work effectively, everyone involved must understand their roles and responsibilities. Development materials should be assembled to help citizens, developers and public officials gain a better understanding of how the development process in each community works. Planning and zoning approval processes, applications, checklists and other materials commonly required should be readily available online. Documents should provide a general overview of development processes and steps necessary to obtain approvals. Documents providing contact information, specific instructions, application forms, checklists and submittal requirements are readily available on the city's website.

The city of Ann Arbor website contains a step-by-step guide to the development review process, an estimated timeline for the development process, pre-application meeting procedures, the city's updated fee schedule, all relevant applications and procedures for development, design guidelines, and a form for credit card payments. These documents are grouped together within the planning and development services website and easy to locate.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The community maintains an online guide to development that explains policies, procedures and steps to obtain approvals.	✓	
	The community annually reviews the fee schedule.	✓	

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Best Practice 4.1—Recruitment and orientation

Best Practice 4.1 evaluates how a community conducts recruitment and orientation for newly appointed or elected officials and board members. Planning commission members should be recruited based on requirements articulated in Michigan Public Act 33 of 2008, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act.

The city of Ann Arbor posts their board and commission application, list of vacancies, and an overview of the role of each board and commission on their website. This helps the average citizen understand the role of each board and commission as well as the tasks they perform.

Assisting newly elected officials and appointees in learning basic information about the structure and processes of government as well as community and economic development is vital to them playing a part in helping the city achieve its goals and objectives. Ann Arbor provides a comprehensive orientation packet to all new board and commission members, which includes the schedule of meetings, bylaws, and other reference materials as needed depending on the committee.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The community sets expectations for boards and commission positions.	✓	
	The community provides orientation packets to newly appointed and elected members of development related boards and commissions.	✓	

Best Practice 4.2—Education and training

Best Practice 4.2 assesses how a community encourages training and tracks training needs for appointed and elected officials, board members and staff. Trainings provide officials and staff with an opportunity to learn, build their knowledge and ultimately make more informed decisions about land use and redevelopment issues.

The city of Ann Arbor has a dedicated source of funding for training of board and commission members as well as staff. The city has identified certain training that the various board and commission members should attend but do not have a formal way to track such trainings. Having a formal training tracking mechanism helps to document the education received by each member, identify gaps and determine what kinds of training each board and commission member needs.

Communication between boards and commissions is essential in decision making. Ann Arbor's planning commission collaborates with the environmental commission and the development review board as needed but does not have a formal joint meeting between the city council, planning commission, zoning board of appeals, DDA, environmental commission, and development review board. Holding an annual meeting helps the city's boards and commissions discuss current successes, issues, goals and objectives.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
(green)	The community has a dedicated source of funding for training.	✓	
(red)	The community identifies training needs and tracks attendance of the governing body, boards, commissions and staff.	☐ Create a training tracking mechanism for city boards, commissions, and staff as outlined in Best Practice 4.2	12 months
(green)	The community encourages board and commission members to attend trainings.	✓	
(yellow)	The community shares information between the governing body, boards, commissions, and staff.	☐ Establish a joint meeting with the city council, planning commission, zoning board of appeals, DDA, environmental commission, and the development review board as outlined in Best Practice 4.2	12 months

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Best Practice 5.1—Redevelopment Ready Sites®

Best Practice 5.1 assesses how a community identifies, visions and markets their priority redevelopment sites. In an effort to increase vibrancy in the William Street area in downtown Ann Arbor, the city developed the Connecting William Street plan. The plan laid out strategies to redevelop five publicly owned parcels currently used as parking lots on or adjacent to William Street. Each site calls for increased density, a mixture of uses and pedestrian friendly features. While the plan contains site specific information for each of the locations, it does not contain all of the elements to be qualified as a Redevelopment Ready Site®. The plan has not prioritized the individual redevelopment sites, identified available resources or assembled a property information packages for each site. Creating a property information package for each site will help developers know that the city is serious about redeveloping specific sites and inform a developer upfront of the known issues with the site and what incentives the city will be willing to offer to offset these issues. The city will be required to package at least one site for certification.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The community identifies and prioritizes individual redevelopment sites.	☐ Prioritize the city's prime redevelopment sites as outlined in RRC Best Practice 5.1	3 months
	The community gathers preliminary development research for prioritized redevelopment sites.	✓	
	A public visioning session is held for the prioritized redevelopment sites.	✓	
	Available resources for the prioritized redevelopment sites are identified.	☐ Identify available resources for prioritized redevelopment sites as outlined in RRC Best Practice 5.1	12 months
	A "Property Information Package" for the prioritized redevelopment site(s) is assembled.	☐ Assemble a property information package for identified prioritized redevelopment sites as outlined in RRC Best Practice 5.1	12 months
	Prioritized redevelopment sites are actively marketed.	✓	

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Best Practice 6.1—Economic development strategies

Best Practice 6.1 evaluates what goals and actions a community has identified to assist in strengthening its overall economic health. Strategic economic development planning is critical to attracting jobs and investment in communities.

Planning for economic development can take many forms. While business development is a core value of economic development, a community needs to include community development and talent in the overall equation for economic success. In May 2013, the Ann Arbor city council created the Economic Development Collaborative Task Force with members from the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority and Ann Arbor SPARK. The task force identified the lack of an economic development strategy as an impediment to the city.

Drafting an economic development strategy for the entire city with goals, actions and benchmarks will help track progress annually.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The governing body has approved an economic development strategy.	☐ Draft and adopt an economic development strategy as outlined in RRC Best Practice 6.1	24 months
	The governing body annually reviews the economic development strategy.	☐ Review the economic development strategy annually as outlined with RRC Best Practice 6.1	24 months

Best Practice 6.2—Marketing and promotion

Best Practice 6.2 evaluates how the community promotes and markets itself. Community marketing and promotion can take many forms, but the goal is to create a positive image that rekindles community pride and improves consumer and investor confidence. The city of Ann Arbor is a member of Ann Arbor SPARK and the chamber of commerce, but is lacking an official marketing strategy. Marketing strategies can help a community identify their target audience and put steps in place to retain and attract that audience.

Visitors to a community's website need to be able to find accurate information quickly so a user-friendly website cannot be over stated. Ann Arbor's website is very user-friendly and updated often. Once the city's property information package and economic development strategy are finalized, they should be uploaded to the city's website so they are accessible to residents and developers.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
	The community has developed a marketing strategy.	☐ Develop a marketing strategy as outlined in RRC Best Practice 6.1	12 months
	The community has an updated, user-friendly municipal website.	✓	

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