

VAN BUREN
CHARTER TOWNSHIP

**PLANNING & ZONING
BOARD MEMBER
TRAINING GUIDE**



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CHARTER TOWNSHIP

INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

The Planning and Zoning Board Member Training Guide aims to help newly appointed board and commission members, along with existing members and staff, understand recommended training and continuing education guidelines. This guide is not meant to be an exhaustive list of trainings available, but to be used to encourage board members and commissioners to explore potential training opportunities. The availability of the trainings listed in this guide are subject to change at any time.



CONTACT INFORMATION

Planning Commissioners and Board of Zoning Appeals Members are encouraged to reach out to Township staff in the Planning & Economic Development Department with suggestions and requests for training. You may contact Dan Power, Director of Planning and Economic Development at dpower@vanburen-mi.org or at 734-699-8913.



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GENERAL INFORMATION

IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING

The Township's Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals make some of the most important decisions in a community. Additionally, these decisions have impacts that reach far into the future. It is important that the Township prioritizes continued education and onboarding training for appointed planning and zoning officials and Township staff. Ongoing training is an important form of risk management that will help the Township avoid lawsuits in planning and zoning issues.

COMMUNICATING TRAINING NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES

Although this guide provides a recommendation on training curriculum for planning and zoning officials and staff, it is important that commissioners and board members communicate to Township staff if they are interested in certain training opportunities for the group. The Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals should discuss training opportunities annually and determine the boards' needs. Township staff will pass along potential training opportunities to board and commission members as they arise.



POST-TRAINING SURVEY

Post-training surveys are used to gauge the effectiveness and overall quality of a training course, workshop, or conference. Appointed officials and staff that have attended a training are encouraged to fill out a survey to ensure we are sending our team to beneficial trainings. **Completed surveys should be turned into the Planning & Economic Development Department.**

TRAINING ATTENDANCE TRACKING

Attendance for training events will be tracked internally by Township staff in the Planning & Economic Development Department.

TRAINING PARTNERS & ORGANIZATIONS

The following organizations offer relevant trainings, workshops and conferences:

Michigan Municipal League	MML
Michigan Townships Association	MTA
The Michigan Association of Planning	MAP
American Planning Association	APA
Michigan State University Extension	MSUE
Michigan Municipal Risk Management Authority	MMRMA
The Community Economic Development Association of Michigan	CEDAM



Other resources that also provide general planning, zoning, economic, and community development information:

Michigan Economic Developers Association
Michigan Economic Development Corporation
Michigan Downtown Association
Congress for New Urbanism
StrongTowns
American Association of Retired Persons Livable Communities
880 Cities
US Economic Development Administration
Form Based Code Institute
Smart Growth America
Recast City
National League of Cities

RECOMMENDED TRAINING CURRICULUM

The following curriculum is recommended by Michigan State University Extension to ensure effective and adequate training for board and commission members.

AMOUNT OF EDUCATION

Position	First Year	Second Year & Beyond
Planning Commissioner	16-22 hours	6-8 hours per year
Board of Zoning Appeals Member	16-22 hours	6-8 hours per year
Planner Only	3-5 days	3-5 days per year
Zoning Administrator Only	3 days	3 days
Planning & Zoning Administrator	6-8 days	6-8 days

RECOMMENDED CURRICULUM

Year	Planning Commission	Board of Zoning Appeals	Zoning Administrator
1	Fundamentals (MAP, MTA)	Fundamentals (MAP, MTA)	Citizen Planner (MSUE)
1	Site Plan Review (MAP, MTA)	Site Plan Review (MAP, MTA)	
1 or 2	Citizen Planner (MSUE)	Citizen Planner (MSUE)	Zoning Administrator Certificate (MSUE)
2	Smart Growth, Placemaking, New Economy	*Same as Planning Commission if anticipating becoming a PC Member	Smart Growth, Placemaking, New Economy
2 or 3	Hot Topics: Statewide updates, law changes, etc. (MSUE, MTA, MML, MAP)	Hot Topics: Statewide updates, law changes, etc. (MSUE, MTA, MML, MAP)	Hot Topics: Statewide updates, law changes, etc. (MSUE, MTA, MML, MAP)
3 +	Local Issues & Topics	*Same as Planning Commission if anticipating becoming a PC Member	*Same as Planning Commission if anticipating becoming a PC Member

Per Van Buren Township's most recently adopted bylaws, BZA members must complete four (4) hours of training per year and Planning Commission members must complete two (2) Township approved training classes or seminars annually.

TYPES OF TRAINING

WEBINARS

Many of our training partners and organizations offer online courses and presentations on relevant planning, zoning, and municipal topics. Webinars allow individuals to save time and money, avoiding the need to travel. They are often convenient and able to be completed around the varying schedules of staff and board members. Webinars can also be viewed as a group during a regularly scheduled meeting to facilitate group discussion.

ON-SITE TRAINING WORKSHOPS

On-site workshops allow for training opportunities to be brought to Van Buren Township facilities. It is more convenient and cost-effective for large groups rather than traveling to an off-site conference. On-site workshops also allow for partnerships with neighboring communities and a chance for groups to learn together and network.



OFF-SITE CONFERENCES & WORKSHOPS

Off-site conferences and workshops are available across Michigan and the nation to allow for a wide variety of training opportunities. Conferences provide an excellent networking opportunity on top of the educational benefit.

ARTICLE DISCUSSIONS

Staff may present articles to the Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals on topics requested by members or other topics they may feel useful for general group education. Articles on “hot topics” in Planning and Zoning allow for a convenient, low-cost way to facilitate discussion between the Staff and Board.

AVAILABLE TRAININGS: WEBINARS

MML

“Open Meetings Act” Covers the laws and regulations of the Open Meetings Act (OMA) and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

“Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Changes” The Public Act 563 of 2014 (HB 4001) makes significant changes to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The changes concern fees charged by public bodies for public records, civil actions brought under the Act, and the receipt and denial of requests; and would add provisions allowing a person to appeal to a public body or bring a civil action if he or she believed that a fee was unreasonable.

“Local Government 101” This webinar will give attendees an overview of basic local government, the foundation and history that Michigan government was built upon, and the roles and responsibilities elected officials have as part of their council or commission.

MTA

“Introduction to Planning & Zoning: The Basics Review the basic elements of planning and zoning, including the planning and zoning enabling acts that laid the foundation. Examine the structure and function of the planning commission and zoning board of appeals, along with the role of the township board.

“Roles and Functions of the Zoning Board of Appeals: Variances” Discover the “ins and outs” of variances, including identifying strategies and considerations when hearing variance requests and decision standards that will hold up in court. Find out more about non-use and use variances and review the top 10 incorrect reasons variances are granted.

“New Officials Training – Getting Started Right” Learn more about MTA, get an overview of township government, what townships do and how to finance it, basics of financial oversight and tips for great board meetings. General content helpful for all members of a township, but especially for elected officials.

“Making Meetings Work More Effectively” Structure your meetings to achieve more in less time! Explore how your board might define its “rules of engagement” so that the meetings will be orderly and productive. Learn how to deal with differences around the board table while staying focused on results. Conflict resolution techniques are also incorporated as part of the training.

“Meeting Misconceptions” Township board meetings, annual meetings, special meetings, public hearings, workshop meetings, joint meetings ... should we continue? Are you confused by the variety of meetings in which your township board is involved? Gain insight into the laws that provide information on how meetings are conducted and whether each is required to comply with the Open Meetings Act.

“At Your Service: Meeting Township Needs” Learn more about the role, authority and legal requirements of the township board in funding and delivering services. From property taxes to fees and charges, special assessments to grants and donations, this session will help you identify a variety of funding sources, and the limitations associated with each. Examine the township board’s responsibility in assuring that the risks inherent with the services provided are properly managed. Delve into the board’s role in risk management and learn to identify and examine your townships exposure to loss. Learn strategies that will help you evaluate whether your township’s services are effectively serving the community and what considerations should be made today to ensure future viability.

MSUE

Citizen Planner Program Land use education and training to locally appointed and elected planning officials throughout Michigan. Teaches the fundamentals on roles, responsibilities and best practices for planning and zoning in Michigan.

AVAILABLE TRAININGS: ON-SITE

MML

“Building a High-Functioning Leadership Team” This full-day workshop is designed to assist elected and appointed officials in bridging seemingly disparate roles and responsibilities to form a leadership team capable of effectively tackling the complicated goals and interests of your community.

“Parliamentary Procedure” Do your meetings run smoothly? Is your council or board debating issues until late into the night? By using parliamentary procedure, you can gain control and have more productive meetings. This basic guide to fair and orderly procedure in meetings helps keep discussions focused and helps you accomplish the business on the agenda. This session focuses on council meetings, with all of the problems and interruptions that can complicate them. Quorums and types of motions will be explained and demonstrated. Participants also learn about the basic principles and objectives of parliamentary procedure, knowledge of charters, amendments, handling motions, debate, public hearings, voting requirements, and agendas.

“Everything Meetings” Geared to help public bodies conduct smooth, well-run, legal meetings, this training intertwines the rules of parliamentary procedure and the legal aspects of the Open Meetings Act. Quorums and types of motions will be explained and demonstrated.

“Essentials of Local Government” The Essentials of Local Government training consists of a customizable mix of core topics that help educate elected and appointed officials on the basic functions they will need to know in their role as a public leader. Pick and choose from the following topics to be covered in this three-hour training: Introduction to League Services; Overview of Basic Local Government; Roles and Responsibilities; Open Meetings Act, and Freedom of Information Act.

MAP

“Planning Commissioner Toolkit” The Planning Commission plays a pivotal role in the development of a community. This workshop explains all of the Planning Commission duties from the master plan to site plan review and everything in between. How to conduct a meeting, handling difficult cases and conflict of interest are also reviewed.

“Zoning Board of Appeals” (2.5 hours) Quasi-judicial functions of the zoning process are handled by the Zoning Board of Appeals. This interactive, case study based workshop goes into greater depth on the issues of practical difficulty and unnecessary hardship. A summary of voting and membership requirements and other procedural requirements unique to ZBA operations are reviewed.

“Site Plan Review” (3.5 hours) This program will demonstrate the site plan review and approval process and provide practical tools and techniques on how to read a site plan. You'll discuss site design principles, such as pedestrian and traffic considerations, lighting, utilities, ADA compliance, inspections, and landscaping. Participants in this hands-on workshop receive an engineering scale, turning template and a sample site plan to evaluate.

“Risk Management” (2.5 hours) As more communities face litigation related to planning and zoning decisions, this is essential training for all elected officials, planning commissioners and zoning board of appeals members. Topics include identifying a conflict of interest, applying discretionary standards during special land use reviews, reasonable expectations of a developer and how your comprehensive plan can minimize risk.

“Capital Improvements Programs” (2.5 hours) Do you know what the Planning Enabling Act says about the CIP? Do you know what should be included, and how often it should be updated? This program explains-- from start to finish-- everything you need to know to prepare and adopt a Capital Improvement Program, including: who should be involved in the Capital Improvement Program process; the accounting and budgetary requirements of a CIP; how to tie the program into your infrastructure capacity; and how to handle controversial topics.

“Community Engagement” (3 hours) Knowing which public engagement technique to use for which audience, and managing the public participation process so that all voices can be heard, all the while ensuring that the input is meaningful and relevant is one of a planner's greatest challenges. A process that can be rife with politics, on one hand, and rewarding and beneficial on the other, is part and parcel of the effort. This interactive session explains best practices on how to engage with community members and stakeholders in a more meaningful way.

“Planning for Health” (2 hours) Community planners can lead the charge at the local level to develop and implement planning policies and zoning regulations for land use and a built environment that is conducive to healthy, active living. Workshop participants will gain an understanding of how to engage the community around a vision of health; how to move plan goals and objectives to a “health in all policies” framework; how to develop and use health impact assessments; and the importance of including an implementation plan that includes zoning and other regulatory language.

“The Master Planning Process” (2.5 hours) Are you considering creating a new master plan or amending an existing one? This workshop is for you! Roll up your sleeves and learn step-by-step more about the requirements, components, and stakeholder involvement you'll need to organize when drafting or amending a master plan. Includes community-specific demographics discussion and brief overview of community engagement principles.

“Zoning Administration” (4.5 hours) The zoning administrator is responsible for ensuring the integrity and effectiveness of the zoning process and for the public support it receives. Since he or she is often the initial contact with affected property owners, intelligent administration and enforcement conducted with sensitivity to public relations is essential. This program is for zoning administrators in rural, suburban, or urban settings as well as municipal officials, other staff members, or citizens interested in a more complete understanding of all facets of zoning administration.

“Planning & Zoning Essentials (Basic Training) (4.5 hours) This information-packed program is perfect for new planning commissioners and zoning board of appeals members, but it's also a great refresher course for more experienced officials or elected officials looking to learn more about these boards. Roles and responsibilities of the board, site plan review, comprehensive planning, zoning ordinances, planned unit developments, and standards for decision-making are all on the agenda.

AVAILABLE TRAININGS: OFF-SITE

MAP

Planning Michigan Annual Conference MAP's premiere, annual educational event. This event has general sessions, national experts, breakouts, mobiles, networking, basic and advanced courses.

Spring Institute Recent topics have included: Social Equity Aging in Place, Climate Adaptation, as well as Entrepreneurs and Economic Development.

Regional Workshops Each Spring, MAP brings workshops for officials to communities across the state.

MTA

Hot Topics in Planning and Zoning This program identifies emerging issues in planning and zoning, and is a must for planning commissioners, township board members and zoning administrators. Dig into land use and zoning issues that are preempted from regulation by state or federal law. Mining operations, oil and gas facilities, event barns and short-term rental properties are just a few of the hot-button regulatory issues facing townships. Explore preemption issues and regulatory strategies for event barns and short-term rental properties. Learn the fine art of balancing property rights while maintaining the peace and character of your community.

APA

National Planning Conference Packed with learning, sharing, connecting, and fun into four exciting days. The conference includes a variety of topics and an educational program covering emerging issues, new trends, and best practices in planning.

CEDAM

Developing Vibrant Communities Developing Vibrant Communities (DVC) is designed to inspire and equip practitioners and advocates with the community economic development and financial empowerment strategies needed to positively transform their communities. This is CEDAM and CDAD's premier training event for those working to make their communities inclusive, empowered, sustainable and vibrant.

MMRMA

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Open Meetings Act (OMA) Workshop

MMRMA presents a special one-day seminar on the Freedom of Information Act and Open Meetings Act. The seminar will provide clear and concise procedural guidelines as contained within the MMRMA FOIA Coordinator Handbook and Open Meetings Act Handbook, both of which will be provided to each participant. The purpose of the FOIA and OMA acts are to promote government openness and accountability, as well as to ensure greater public access and input into the governing process. This seminar will provide guidelines for how public entities are to conduct their business, not only in meetings open to the public, but also relating to citizen's rights to access and request disclosure of public records and documents.

TRAINING REPORT OUTS

It is important that Board Members share information between elected and appointed individuals as well as staff following training events. At the next, regularly scheduled meeting of the Board after the training event occurs, Board Members and Staff shall share and discuss information on topics covered as well as distribute any available handouts or supplemental materials. Follow up discussions may be scheduled at that time depending on interests of the Board and priority of training topics.



POST-TRAINING SURVEY

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Please check the box that best describes you.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Planning Commissioner
<input type="checkbox"/>	Board of Zoning Appeals Member
<input type="checkbox"/>	VBT Staff
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (Please Specify)

For each statement circle the number which best reflects your views on a scale of 1 to 5.

	Agree		Neutral	Disagree	
The session met or exceeded my expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
I now have a clearer understanding of the course content.	1	2	3	4	5
The course will be valuable to me in my role with the Township.	1	2	3	4	5
The information was provided in a clear and precise manner.	1	2	3	4	5
The day and time of the course were satisfactory.	1	2	3	4	5
The overall experience was helpful and informative.	1	2	3	4	5
I would encourage my peers to attend a similar training session.	1	2	3	4	5

Please note any additional comments or suggestions.

CURRENT TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Viewing this document electronically, please click the link below to view current training opportunities and express your interest in them. Otherwise, please email dpower@vanburen-mi.org to inquire about current training opportunities.

CURRENT TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

(^Link)