



**redevelopment ready**  
communities®

# RRC Baseline Report

**City of Westland**

April 2020



**MICHIGAN ECONOMIC**  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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# Executive summary

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 projects that create places where people want to live, work and invest.

To become formally engaged in the RRC program, communities must complete the RRC self-evaluation, send at least one representative to the best practice trainings, and pass a resolution of intent, outlining the value the community sees in participating in the program. Representatives from Westland completed the training in April 2019 and council passed a resolution to participate in May 2019. The community also submitted a complete self-evaluation in May 2019.

Developed by experts in the public and private sector, the RRC Best Practices are the standard to achieve certification, designed to create a predictable experience for investors, businesses and residents working within a community; communities must demonstrate that all best practice criteria have been met to receive RRC certification. This evaluation finds the community currently in full alignment with 35 percent of the best practice criteria and partially aligned with another 45 percent. The community recently completed a master plan update (adopted in 2018) which provides a strong foundation for addressing many of the other best practices. Other areas where the city is currently aligned include public participation efforts, having an up-to-date downtown plan, and having clear development review processes outlined on the website.

This report includes a number of recommendations for how the community can fully align with the best practices. Each recommendation has been customized to fit Westland and is backed by research and conversations specific to the community; however, these recommendations are just the beginning of the conversation. RRC is focused heavily on intent versus prescriptive "to-dos." As the community works through the process, it may identify other ways to meet the intent of a particular best practice. The community's RRC planner will be there every step of the way to discuss those ideas, direct the community to resources, and provide general guidance. In addition to the community's RRC planner, other partners should be at the table including the downtown development authority, state partners, and individual residents. RRC is a collaborative effort and is most successful when all parties are willing to engage to open dialogue so that Michigan communities can be on the forefront of developing unique identities and prosperous businesses.

Once the community has had a chance to digest the contents of this report, it will need to decide whether to continue with the RRC process. If it opts to reach for certification, it will result in a fully streamlined, predictable and transparent development process that is guided by a shared community vision. This will increase the community's ability to grow local investment and attract outside investment. It will also allow the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to better understand the community's desires for the future and how state tools and resources can help achieve that goal. MEDC looks forward to working with Westland on its efforts to reach certification and to a prosperous relationship for many years to come.

# Methodology

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 and interviews, as well as 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; meeting minutes and website. In confidential interviews, the team also records the input of local business owners and developers who have worked with the community.

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 is significantly outdated.

This report represents the community's current status in meeting all the redevelopment ready processes and practices. This baseline establishes a foundation for the community's progress as it moves forward in the program. All questions should be directed to the RRC team at [RRC@michigan.org](mailto:RRC@michigan.org).



## Evaluation snapshot

Westland has completed 35 percent of the Redevelopment Ready Communities® criteria and is in the process of completing another 45 percent.						
1.1.1	1.1.2	1.1.3 (N/A)	1.1.4	1.2.1	1.2.2	1.2.3
2.1.1	2.1.2	2.1.3	2.1.4	2.1.5	2.1.6	2.1.7
2.1.8	3.1.1	3.1.2	3.1.3	3.1.4	3.1.5	3.1.6
3.1.7	3.1.8	3.2.1	3.2.2	4.1.1	4.1.2	4.2.1
4.2.2	4.2.3	4.2.4	5.1.1	5.1.2	5.2.1	5.2.2
6.1.1	6.1.2	6.1.3	6.1.4	6.1.5	6.1.6	

## Best Practice 1.1—The plans

Best Practice 1.1 evaluates community planning and how the redevelopment vision is embedded in the master plan, downtown plan and capital improvements plan. The master plan sets expectations for those involved in new development and redevelopment, giving the public some degree of certainty about their vision for the future, while assisting the community in achieving its stated goals. Local plans can provide key stakeholders with a road map for navigating the redevelopment process in the context of market realities and community goals. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA), Public Act 33 of 2008, requires that the planning commission create and approve a master plan as a guide for development and review the master plan at least once every five years after adoption. The Westland city council most recently adopted a master plan in June 2018. Westland's master plan was built upon previous planning studies, and extensive community engagement, including guidance from a steering committee, web-based communication, surveys, and public meetings. The information gathered through the steering committee, city, and public engagement were used to establish the vision, goals, and objectives set forth in the plan. Westland's plan provides a strong framework for understanding regional and national trends, the city's background, demographics, and place in the region. The former city hall site, the Norwayne Community, and the Westland Historic Village are all areas that have been selected as potential areas for redevelopment. There are many discussions throughout the master plan that focus on improving the city's aging infrastructure, however the most prominent infrastructure discussion is focused on non-motorized transportation and complete streets infrastructure. Westland's master plan contains a chapter on non-motorized transportation, with project recommendations, time frames, responsible parties, and potential resources. The city has a vision for the future and is clearly focused on improving resident health and mobility. A discussion on future land use, as well as a zoning plan, can be found in Chapter 5 of the master plan. A strong implementation section to translate the community's goals and visions to reality is included in Chapter 7 of the master plan. Goals

include "strengthening neighborhoods, standout as a regional destination, lead as a compassionate city, provide premier amenities, and advance green practices." Each goal includes various objectives, timelines, responsible parties, and potential resources and partners. Additional recommendations include creating a capital improvements plan and implementing zoning updates and changes laid out in the zoning plan. In the 2018 "Planning Commission Annual Report," it is stated that the master plan was adopted in 2018. The city plans to use the "Planning Commission Annual Report" to document and communicate progress on Master Plan implementation. The city should be sure to use the implementation table in chapter 7 to annually report progress on the master plan.

While Westland does not have a "traditional downtown" the city does have a downtown development authority (DDA) and tax increment financing (TIF) plan, most recently updated in 2009, focused amending the plan extending the TIF plan from 2025. A map of DDA boundaries can be found on the website and within the 1998 plan. Projects outlined in the 2009 plan include the Ford Road redevelopment project, Ford Road overpass beautification project, Ford Road lighting/enhancement project, Wayne Road lighting/enhancement project, marketing the district, and park and public area improvements. The Ford Road redevelopment project continues to be a top priority of the authority, as a highly visible, frequently traveled thoroughfare which helps to shape the identity of the community. Streetscape improvements were approved and installed along the Ford Road corridor at major intersections, with irrigation repairs and installation also taking place in order to expand the beautification efforts in 2020. Projects in the development area are estimated to cost twenty million dollars. The DDA is committed to transparency, which is demonstrated by posting the essential planning documents, the budget, and a variety of contracts on the website. The DDA also posts project updates, most recently from 2019, and successful events on the website.

Dwindling resources and increasing costs put pressure on local governments to make limited budgets work more efficiently. A comprehensive capital improvement

# Best Practice findings

## Best Practice 1.1—The plans *continued*

plan (CIP) is an essential tool for the planning and development of the physical and economic wellbeing of a community. The CIP is a tool to implement the vision and goals identified in other plans and provides a link between planning and budgeting for capital projects. Not only do the RRC Best Practices require a six-year CIP, Westland's master plan recommends that the city annually prepare a six-year CIP to review and approve

public infrastructure projects, such as streets, parks, and utility infrastructure. The recommendation in the master plan includes steps for successfully creating a CIP. The city currently includes a five-year capital project fund within the budget projecting out to 2024. To meet RRC Best Practices, Westland should create a six-year CIP inclusive of all public infrastructure projects and make it available on the city website.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
1.1.1	The governing body has adopted a master plan in the past five years.	<input type="checkbox"/> Use the implementation table in Chapter 7 to annually report progress on the master plan	Q1 2021
1.1.2	The governing body has adopted a downtown plan.	✓	
1.1.3	The governing body has adopted a corridor plan.	The downtown plan focuses on a corridor.	
1.1.4	The governing body has adopted a capital improvements plan.	<input type="checkbox"/> Create a six-year CIP and make it available on city website	Q2 2021

# Best Practice findings

## Best Practice 1.2—Public participation

Best Practice 1.2 assesses how well the community identifies and engages its stakeholders on a continual basis. Public participation aims to prevent or minimize disputes by creating a process for resolving issues before they become an obstacle. Communities who regularly engage their residents also build long term trust and see greater support for plans and other initiatives.

Basic public participation methods that Westland has undertaken include following the Open Meetings Act, newspaper posting, website posting, fliers posted on the city hall doors, attachments to water bills, and announcements at governing body meetings. Proactive methods include individual mailing, charettes, community workshops, focus groups, canvassing, and social networking. In 2018, the city conducted extensive public engagement around updates for their Tax Increment Finance Authority and special districts. Engagement efforts included four public workshops, held at a variety of times and locations. The city also partnered with the DDA in 2018 to hold design workshop groups, a charrette, and conduct a corridor bus tour for the reimagining of Ford Road and the former city hall site. Authentic and timely engagement is critical to obtaining buy-in from community stakeholders. Having a clear public engagement strategy confirms that the community values citizen input in the decision-making process and ensures accountability. Westland has developed a comprehensive and proactive public participation strategy to guide the city in engaging the public throughout the development process.

Through the public participation strategy, Westland has committed to engaging a diverse group of stakeholders and making participation accessible to all who wish to participate. The city has also committed to encouraging the involvement of stakeholders most affected by planning, zoning, and development decisions; ensuring public participation through all stages of the planning and review processes; distributing information and soliciting feedback through all communicative channels available; and recording and sharing the results of public participation with stakeholders in a timely and effective manner. The public participation plan outlines many effective methods for public participation, including written surveys, digital polls, participation on boards and commissions, public meetings and more. The city has acknowledged that some development projects may be controversial, in need of additional public engagement, and has outlined methods to do so. Third party consultants may be utilized by Westland in order to conduct impartial public participation; these consultants are required to adhere to the city's public participation plan. The data and results obtained through the city's public engagement efforts will be shared through a variety of methods including public meetings, survey results on the city website, and sharing on social media. Westland has committed to evaluate the success of its public participation efforts for effectiveness and will annually review the public participation plan and make improvements as needed.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
1.2.1	The community has a documented public participation plan for engaging a diverse set of community stakeholders.	✓	
1.2.2	The community demonstrates that public participation efforts go beyond the basic methods.	✓	
1.2.3	The community shares outcomes of public participation processes.	✓	

## Best Practice 2.1—Zoning regulations

Best Practice 2.1 evaluates the community's zoning ordinance and assesses how well it implements the goals of the master plan. Zoning is a significant mechanism for achieving desired land use patterns and quality development.

### ALIGNMENT WITH THE 2017 MASTER PLAN

Foundationally, the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEA), Public Act 110 of 2006, requires that a zoning ordinance be based on a plan to help guide zoning decisions. Westland's zoning ordinance was primarily developed in the 1980s, with minor revisions in the time since. The 2017 master plan does reference does provide a zoning plan showing how the city's current zoning districts align with the future land-use categories. However, the city has already indicated that it intends to update the zoning ordinance and an audit is commonly performed as part of any zoning update to assess master plan alignment.

### CONCENTRATED DEVELOPMENT

This best practice criterion evaluates if the ordinance allows vertical mixed-use development by-right, incorporates placemaking provisions, and addresses historic preservation. While Westland's DDA district is large and takes up the majority of the Ford and Wayne Road Corridors, the Ford Road overlay district (FROD, Sec. 110-9.8) has been designated as Westland's area of concentrated development. The intent of this overlay district is to create a pedestrian friendly, viable, and attractive mixed-use corridor along Ford Road by utilizing higher design standards and flexibility from underlying zoning regulations. Mixed-use developments with upper-story residential dwelling units located above nonresidential uses are permitted in the district, as long as nonresidential uses are not on the same floor as residential uses (9.8.3). The FROD also requires all buildings to have at least one public entrance that faces Ford Road (9.8.8) and promotes historic preservation by requiring all buildings to retain their original entrance if historically accurate. The ordinance also requires building facades to include windows on public facing streets, and subdivide large, long walls into bays. Minimum

ground floor transparency of a minimum 60 percent and maximum 70 percent of façade area are required.

### HOUSING DIVERSITY

“Missing Middle” housing is a term referring to a range of multi-unit or clustered housing types with a range in affordability, compatible in scale with single family homes that help meet the growing demand for walkable urban living. Missing middle housing continues to be in short supply across the nation and is limiting business development in some areas as housing shortages can have negative impacts on employee recruitment. Zoning codes that permit missing middle housing types are important for attracting business development deals and the residents who come with them. This best practice looks to see that the ordinance clearly allows at least three type of missing middle housing by-right. Westland's master plan identified the goal promoting a variety of quality housing types by allowing for more “missing middle” housing and mixed-use development in the zoning code. The city currently allows for row houses or townhouses (attached residential dwelling units) and upper story residential dwelling units above nonresidential uses in the Ford Road overlay district as a principal permitted use. When updating the zoning ordinance to align with the Master Plan, the city's housing supply, the city should look at including, as by-right, principal permitted uses, options such as increasing the zoning districts that allow small townhome and rowhome developments, cluster housing, stacked flats, and accessory dwelling units (aka mother-in-law flats). Westland could also include provisions for live/work housing, corporate temporary housing, cluster housing, and micro units.

### NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION

This best practice evaluates the ordinance's support for alternative modes of transportation, primarily walking and biking. Ordinance provisions such as requiring the completion of sidewalk systems, bike parking, traffic calming or streetscape standards can all assist the city in encouraging non-motorized transportation which reduces automobile trips—a stated goal of the

## Best Practice 2.1—Zoning regulations *continued*

Master Plan—and creates healthier, more equitable communities. The master plan recommends that Westland “update the zoning code to include walkable and bicycle amenities in new developments.” One of the biggest hindrances to encourage safe bicycling and walking connectivity are when new developments occur. Westland could update its zoning code to require for a minimum bike parking standard as well as encourage shared use paths or sidewalks on the periphery of the site. It is recommended that Westland review and update their zoning code.” Currently, site plan approval standards in Section 110-12.4.6 require a pedestrian circulation system as an approval standard, otherwise the ordinance is silent on non-motorized transportation. RRC recommends that the city consult the nonmotorized transportation plan (Chapter 6) within the master plan and then determine the best course of action for how to incorporate non-motorized transportation components into the zoning ordinance.

### PARKING FLEXIBILITY

Parking is a necessary amenity in any community; however, emerging technologies in the mobility industry and increasing land values require communities to reconsider the long-term impact of parking requirements. Redevelopment Ready Communities® are preparing for this future by including tools to allow for creative solutions or exemptions to parking minimums. Westland’s Ford Road overlay district ordinance has aspects that both add to and decrease parking flexibility. The FROD allows for shared parking agreements, which helps the city meet RRC Best Practices, however, there is a minimum parking requirement for three parking spaces for every 1,000 square feet of nonresidential area and 1.25 required spaces for every residential unit, which can lead to an overabundance of parking. In the general “Off Street Parking and Loading Requirements” article, the city does provide for the collective provisions of parking with up to a 25 percent reduction in required parking if the demands for the two uses do not overlap in time and it is specifically approved as part of the site plan approval process (Sec. 110-16.2.f). Westland may want to consider increasing the flexibility in the city’s parking provisions, and

implementing some of the goals laid out in their master plan, by integrating some of the following tools into the zoning ordinance: the reduction or elimination of required parking when on-street public parking is available, encouraging connections between parking lots, parking maximums, parking waivers, electric vehicle charging stations, bicycle parking, payment in lieu of parking, or the complete elimination of parking minimums.

### GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Like transportation, our understanding of the long term environmental and fiscal impacts of sustainable green infrastructure continues to evolve. Communities who incorporate provisions to support such infrastructure show a forward-thinking approach to development which is attractive to investors and residents alike. Westland’s zoning ordinance currently provides three tools to meet this best practice. The first is Section 110-11.3.2 outlines tree planning standards for the buffering of nonresidential uses adjacent to a public thoroughfare. The second is the parking area landscape provisions found in Section 110-11.3.3 and additional parking lot buffering standards for the FROD, which can be found in Section 110-9.8.9. Tree preservation standards can be found in Article XVII.

### FLEXIBLE DEVELOPMENT

Even the best ordinance can’t predict every possible development scenario. As such, Redevelopment Ready Communities® include tools that allow them to be flexible in certain circumstances. Westland’s ordinance includes clear special land use procedures and standards (Article XIII) and nonconforming uses, buildings, and structures (Article V) regulations—both of which provide some flexibility in preserving past development or allowing some types of development in areas outside their permitted space. The city also includes a couple of new economy uses such as laboratories for research and testing in the light industrial district (Sec. 110.10.3) facilities and thermal, electric, steam, solar, and/or atomic power plants in the general industrial district (Sec. 110.10.4). Westland’s ordinance also utilizes overlay zones for the Ford Road overlay district. While



## Best Practice 2.1—Zoning regulations *continued*

the city does meet this best practice, it may want to consider including additional new economy uses, such as breweries, distilleries, indoor recreation, heavy arts, and small-scale manufacturing downtown, within the ordinance. The city could also include tools such as density bonuses along key corridors.

### USER FRIENDLINESS

Not typically a word associated with legal frameworks such as zoning ordinances, user-friendliness works to increase the ease with which a potential developer can find the information they need as they conduct initial research into whether the community is a good fit. At a minimum, RRC Best Practices call for the community

to provide an online version of the zoning ordinance with clear definitions. RRC staff was able to easily locate the zoning ordinance on the city's website. While the ordinance is all digital, searchable, and managed through MuniCode, it is lacking some key elements that would make more user friendly and easy to interpret. Keeping all this in mind, RRC recommends that when the city updates the zoning ordinance it incorporate modern user-friendly tools such as centralizing development requirements, like setbacks, minimum lot sizes, parking requirements, and permitted uses instead of having them located in each zoning district, also creating tables for those items, and providing graphic examples where appropriate.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
2.1.1	The governing body has adopted a zoning ordinance that aligns with the goals of the master plan.	<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct a zoning audit to identify needed updates to align with the master plan and DDA reimagine Ford Road goals	Q1 2021
2.1.2	The zoning ordinance provides for areas of concentrated development in appropriate locations and encourages the type and form of development desired.	✓	
2.1.3	The zoning ordinance includes flexible tools to encourage development and redevelopment.	✓	
2.1.4	The zoning ordinance allows for a variety of housing options.	<input type="checkbox"/> Update the zoning ordinance to include at least one addition non-traditional housing type by-right	Q1 2021
2.1.5	The zoning ordinance includes standards to improve non-motorized transportation.	<input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate at least one provision to support nonmotorized transportation goals from the master plan into the zoning ordinance	Q1 2021
2.1.6	The zoning ordinance includes flexible parking standards.	✓	
2.1.7	The zoning ordinance includes standards for environmental preservation and green infrastructure.	✓	
2.1.8	The zoning ordinance is user-friendly.	<input type="checkbox"/> Centralize development standards for all districts, incorporate tables and graphics	Q1 2021

## Best Practice 3.1—Development review policy and procedures

Best Practice 3.1 evaluates the community's development review policies and procedures, project tracking and internal/external communications. An efficient site plan review process is integral to being redevelopment ready and can assist a community in attracting investment dollars while ensuring its zoning ordinance and other laws are followed. Much like all RRC Best Practices, aligning with this best practice looks different for communities based on a number of factors such as population, staff capacity, development activity and whether the community handles building inspections directly. And while each solution may look different, together they build a development review process which is predictable, transparent and efficient.

### DEFINED PROCESSES

This best practice looks to ensure the community's development review processes are clearly laid out in the zoning ordinance and the responsibilities of various bodies are clearly established. Westland's site plan review procedures and standards is defined in Article XII of the zoning ordinance with major steps and information such as application information and decision deadlines. The zoning ordinance also addresses special land use procedures and standards (Article XIII). Information about the roles and responsibilities of the planning department, building department, zoning board of appeals planning commission, city council, and department of public service, can be found in Article III, "Administration and Enforcement."

### INTAKE PROFESSIONAL (ZONING ADMINISTRATOR)

Having a clearly defined point person for the development review process ensures an applicant can quickly get answers to their questions. It also ensures someone can identify next steps and keep the process moving. For Westland, contact information for the planning director, Mohamed Ayoub, can be easily found on the city website.

### CONCEPTUAL REVIEW MEETINGS

Conceptual review meetings—sometimes called

preapplication meetings—offer applicants a chance to discuss their project with city staff prior to investing significant time and money into application materials. These meetings typically cover the review process, identify key zoning provisions and connect the applicant with other helpful resources. The "Planning Process" page of Westland's website encourages developers to contact and meet informally with the Planning Department before any formal plans are submitted to discuss zoning and site design issues. This meeting allows the city to inform the developer and or builder of the appropriate ordinances, as well as the steps required for review. Westland could improve this process and by including create a brief outline of how to prepare/what will be covered. Providing those upfront expectations will help ensure the meeting information is consistent and that everyone is making the best use of their time. This item can commonly be done in conjunction with creating a "Guide to Development" (see Best Practice 3.2).

### JOINT REVIEWS

Development projects are complex and impact communities in many ways from land use and traffic to utilities and public safety. Site plan review approval standards touch on many of these and in order to ensure the planning commission has all the information it needs to make a decision on those standards, communities should ensure appropriate city staff, consultants and outside agencies are looking at site plans during the internal review process. Many communities establish a core joint review team who look at all applications and bring in other reviewers on a case-by-case basis. Per Westland's website, the city has a development review committee that consists of the mayor, planning director, economic development director, and the building director. The development review committee typically meets once a month to review upcoming proposals and other administrative issues. At this review, the mayor and the directors discuss the development and determine the appropriateness of the proposal. Since this is an administrative committee, the meetings are not open to the public. Once a request has been formally submitted, an in-house site plan review meeting is scheduled

## Best Practice 3.1—Development review policy and procedures *continued*

approximately one week after the submission. The eight (8) sets of site plans are submitted to the reviewing city departments, which include the Assessing Department, the Building Department, the Department of Public Service, the Engineering Division, the Fire Department, Police Department and the Planning Department. These departments review the site plan and attend the in-house meeting with their comments and requirements in writing. A representative of the petitioner should be in attendance. This meeting is designed to provide the petitioner with the appropriate requirements and gives all parties the opportunity to discuss not only ordinance and code requirements but the desires of the administration and the departments for each specific site or proposal. Eighteen (18) sets of site plans revised to reflect the requirement and comments of the in-house review meeting and a digital copy of all plans and paperwork on disc (in .pdf format) must be submitted to the planning department within two weeks in order to meet the deadline for the planning commission meeting.

### INTERNAL REVIEW PROCESS AND STANDARDS

Zoning ordinances address overall steps of a development review process, but they don't typically address what happens internally when an application is submitted and when a decision is rendered. This process is just as important as it includes vital activity such as determining if an application is complete, whether it meets the standards based on staff review and how the applicant can address any potential deficiencies prior to the final decision. How this process is handled can also impact predictability and fairness in the process if it's not done in a consistent way. This is especially true when longtime staff leave, and someone must take over the process as a temporary or new zoning administrator. As such, RRC communities take the time to determine the internal review process and document key steps, roles, responsibilities and timelines. Westland does not currently have a documented internal review process and while it will likely be a simple document, going through the effort to create it will provide an essential tool, that can ensure standards are adhered to and the process remains smooth in the face to employee turnover. One

area where the city is already aligned with this Best Practice is by having clear approval standards outlined in section 110-12.4 of the zoning ordinance.

### PROMPT ACTION

There's no one way to conduct a development review process—it varies from community to community. As such, there's no one time frame that makes a community "prompt" in their approvals. But there are a few common ways that communities can reduce unnecessary delays: allowing permitted uses to be approved administratively or by the planning commission, having active coordination between zoning and building officials, and displaying the development review process visually to help applicants easily understand the steps and timeframes. Unfortunately, permitted use site plan approvals in Westland must go through both a planning council review, including a public hearing, and a final review by city council. To streamline the process, saving all parties time and money, and meet RRC Best Practices, Westland should update the ordinance to eliminate council review and approval of permitted use site plans. To further streamline development, the city could consider removing the public hearing for permitted use site plans as it can create unpredictability for the developer at the end of the process. The city may also want to consider allowing for some level of administrative staff review, where appropriate. The building department is kept aware of the site plan progress through the joint site plan review and monthly meetings with the mayor. Creating flowcharts with timelines can provide a visual representation of the process, helping potential applicants understand. Westland has created and submitted draft flowcharts with estimated timelines for both the development review process and the building process. To meet RRC Best Practices, the city should finalize the flowcharts and make them available on the website.

### TRACKING SYSTEM(S)

Tracking development applications through the process has many benefits including increased transparency, accountability, and predictability. While this best

## Best Practice 3.1—Development review policy and procedures *continued*

practice doesn't recommend a specific tracking system, it does look to see that the community is recording the application's major steps as they occur. Common milestones include submittal, distributed for internal review, issuing of staff report (if any), planning commission date, final decision, issuing of permit(s), and occupancy. There may be other steps for processes such as special land uses, variances and rezoning. Westland is using BS&A to track and coordinate projects.

### CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND REVIEW

Development review is required in many communities, it is also a service. And as with all services, the experience an applicant has can play a large role in whether they decide to return and if they recommend the community as a place for others to invest. In order to ensure the

community is always providing the best service it can, it should establish some way to collect feedback on the experience. Most communities choose to provide a paper or electronic survey to applicants with their approval (or denial) letter and permit. Some communities have a link to a survey available on their "Planning and Zoning" page. Other communities do annual surveys of all applicants at once. Yet others have documented policy of consistently conducting follow up calls or visits to collect feedback. The city currently has no formal approach to collecting feedback. There's no shortage of ways to align with this Best Practice and Westland should determine what makes the most sense for it locally. Once Westland has developed a method for obtaining feedback, the city should be sure to review that feedback, at least annually, and integrate improvements to the process accordingly.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
3.1.1	The zoning ordinance articulates a thorough site plan review process.	✓	
3.1.2	The community has a qualified intake professional.	✓	
3.1.3	The community defines and offers conceptual site plan review meetings for applicants.	<input type="checkbox"/> Develop a short outline/checklist of how to prepare and what will be covered in these meetings; include on website	Q4 2020
3.1.4	The appropriate departments engage in joint site plan reviews.	✓	
3.1.5	The community has a clearly documented internal staff review policy.	<input type="checkbox"/> Document the internal review process including steps, roles, responsibilities and timelines	Q4 2020
3.1.6	The community promptly acts on development requests.	<input type="checkbox"/> Update the ordinance to eliminate council review and approval permitted use site plans <input type="checkbox"/> Finalize the flowcharts and make them available on the website	Q4 2020
3.1.7	The community has a method to track development projects.	✓	
3.1.8	The community annually reviews the successes and challenges with the development review process.	<input type="checkbox"/> Establish a system for collecting feedback on the development review/permitting experience <input type="checkbox"/> Establish a process for assessing any needed changes to the development review process at least annually	Q4 2020

## Best Practice 3.2—Guide to Development

Best Practice 3.2 evaluates the availability of the community's development information. Having all the necessary information easily accessible online for developers and residents alike creates a transparent development process that can operate at any time. This information creates a smoother process overall and reduces the amount of time staff spend answering basic questions.

### GUIDE TO DEVELOPMENT

The main avenue for aligning with this Best Practice is to create a "Guide to Development." This document or web page provides valuable guidance and information to applicants ranging from contact information and meeting dates to key ordinances to review, process overviews and financial assistance tools. By gathering this information in a single location, the community can help make the process easier for new and experienced applicants alike. Westland has created a comprehensive draft guide to development. The guide includes all the required information. The city should finalize the guide to development and make it available on their website.

### DEVELOPMENT REVIEW FEES/COSTS

In addition to understanding the process upfront, it's important that an applicant can determine their development review costs as well. Nearly all communities charge an application/permit fee while some also require escrow accounts to fund external review costs by the community's consultants. Other common costs include building review, utility connections and/or performance bonds. Westland has included a fee schedule for site plan applications, special land use applications, rezoning

applications, and land divisions applications within the city's draft guide to development. However, a comprehensive fee schedule is not currently available on the city website. There may be other fees that potential developers or builders in the city would need to be aware of, such as building permit fees, water/sewer fees, or inspection fees. The city indicated in its self-evaluation that fee schedule was most recently reviewed seven to 10 years ago. RRC recommends that the city make a full fee schedule available online, with links on the Planning Page, and that it be reviewed each year along with the budget. Changes will not likely be needed every year, but reviewing it annually helps the city ensure fees do adjust as conditions warrant.

### CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are a lifeline for many businesses and individuals when paying for goods or services. Fees for government services are no different. A local applicant may find the flexibility of a credit card to be helpful in the early stages of the process to conserve cash while an out-of-town applicant can more easily pay fees this way without needing to mail a check or drop-off in person. As such, the RRC Best Practices look for communities to accept credit cards for at least basic fees. There are a number of services available to help communities offer this service and communities often charge a convenience fee to cover their costs—a fee most applicants are more than happy to pay. While Westland does accept credit cards, there is no information on the city's website stating that information. The city should include more detailed information on the website about how to pay for development fees via credit card.

## Best Practice findings

### Best Practice 3.2—Guide to Development *continued*

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
<b>3.2.1</b>	The community maintains a guide to development that explains policies, procedures and steps to obtain approvals.	<input type="checkbox"/> Finalize a "Guide to Development" and make it available on city website	Q4 2020
<b>3.2.2</b>	The community annually reviews the fee schedule.	<input type="checkbox"/> Make the full fee schedule available on the city's website <input type="checkbox"/> Begin reviewing the fee schedule annually during the budget process <input type="checkbox"/> Include more detailed information on the website about how to pay for development fees via credit card	Q4 2020

## 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. Such officials sit on the numerous boards, commissions and committees that advise community leaders on key policy decisions. Ensuring that the community has a transparent method of recruitment, clearly lays out expectations/desired skill-sets, and provides orientation for appointed officials is key to ensuring the community makes the most of these boards and commissions. In cases where a community currently struggles to find interested applicants, these best practices help build long term capacity over time and prepare for it for a day when that may not be the case.

### DOCUMENTING THE APPOINTMENT PROCESS

A common question when anyone applies for a job is what the process is for interviewing and—hopefully—accepting the job. Appointments to local boards and commissions are no different. The appointment process needn't be long or cumbersome but interested applicants should be able to find information such as when the city accepts applicants, who oversees the process, who makes recommendations and/or final appointments, etc. It also helps to determine if a community will hold on to applicant information for a certain time in case of future vacancies. This information could be included directly on an application, on the website, or as a separate document. Currently, the city website includes information about board membership, term expiration, term length, meetings days, times, and locations, and an overview of the board responsibilities. To meet RRC Best Practices, the city should update the website to include information about the board and commission appointment process.

### APPLICATION AVAILABILITY

While many communities require an application for boards and commission appointments, others opt to simply ask for resumes and letters of interest. Westland currently has their board and commission application on the website in two forms, a digital application that can be submitted and a PDF that can be printed and returned to city hall.

### SKILL-SETS AND EXPECTATIONS

Much like a job, it's helpful to assess if someone has a background that might make them uniquely prepared to serve on a board or commission. Also like a job, sometimes we find someone who is still a good fit even without the technical knowledge and we can train them. But laying out desired skill sets and expectations helps set that foundation. For example, to be on the planning commission it may help to have a background in real estate, planning, or architecture. If someone doesn't have that background, they could still be a good fit but should be prepared to learn about those things. The expectations should also make it clear how often the board meets, their responsibilities, how to prepare for meetings and other key information. Many communities include this information on the application or website directly. Some create position descriptions. Westland has submitted a draft of desired skill-sets for board and commission members. To meet RRC Best Practice, the city should include the board and commission skill-set information on the city website.

### ORIENTATION

No one likes to show up to a meeting unprepared. This holds true for new members. In order to help newly appointed or elected members get up-to-speed, the Redevelopment Ready Communities® have established orientation procedures or packets. These packets should include local information such as copies or links to key plans and ordinances as well as city policies. They should also include information on available training resources and general information to prepare a member for the information they'll be involved. Currently, orientation packets are guaranteed for the DDA, TIFA, and LDFA boards. These packets include: links to the master plan and community calendar; member contact information; meeting packet pickup info; meeting schedule for the year; bylaws; current budget; approved board plan; MEDC's Description of that Board; MI State TIF Information; "Robert's Rules of Order" cheat sheet; and a copy of the 2019 Michigan TIF Act. To meet RRC Best Practices, orientation packets should be created for the planning commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and city council.

## Best Practice findings

### Best Practice 4.1—Recruitment and orientation *continued*

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
<b>4.1.1</b>	The community sets expectations for board and commission positions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Document the appointment process from application to orientation <input type="checkbox"/> Include the board and commission skill-set information on the city website	Q1 2021
<b>4.1.2</b>	The community provides orientation packets to all appointed and elected members of development-related boards and commissions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Create orientation packets for planning commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and city council	Q1 2021

## Best Practice 4.2—Education and training

Best Practice 4.2 assesses how a community encourages training and tracks educational activities for appointed and elected officials and staff. Trainings provide officials and staff with an opportunity to expand their knowledge and ultimately make more informed decisions about land use and redevelopment issues. An effective training program includes four components: financial resources to support training, a plan to identify priority topics and track attendance, consistent encouragement to attend trainings and sharing of information between boards and commissions to maximize the return on investment for the community.

### DEDICATED FUNDING

There's an old saying that if you want to understand someone's priorities, look at how they budget and spend their money. The same holds true for communities. The first step in making training a priority is to show that it's a priority by having a dedicated spot in the budget for it. There's no perfect amount of money to make a training program work. No matter the amount, having training as a dedicated line item in the budget helps show it's a priority. Westland allocates money for training (conferences/seminars) annually through a line item in the personnel department.

### TRACKING TRAINING

RRC Best Practices call for communities to track attendance at training events. The purpose of tracking is so that the city can see who is consistently doing training and where knowledge gaps may exist. It also builds a level of accountability to encourage officials to stay updated on the topics they're making legally binding decisions about. Westland has created a training tracking spreadsheet for the DDA, TIFA, LDFA, brownfield authority, and planning commission. This is a great first step for developing a training plan.

### IDENTIFYING TRAINING PRIORITIES AND TRAINING AVENUES

Much like how the community prioritized projects in the DDA or master plan, it should understand its priorities for training. Do members need a refresh on the basics of

being a planning commissioner? With the city looking to update the zoning ordinance, perhaps it should start with some training on what the zoning ordinance's purpose is. Or maybe there's a particular interest in learning more about housing, non-motorized transportation, community capital or some other hot topic. The city understands its priorities best, but it should discuss them at least annually and write them down. Having them written down helps to sort through the plethora of training opportunities out there (free or not).

Whenever someone hears the word training, it typically conjures images of traveling to some meeting, sitting in a chair all day, taking some notes and coming home. This can be time and cost prohibitive for many communities. As such, RRC encourages communities to also consider free online training resources, sharing articles in meeting packets for discussion, asking partner organization to come to a meeting and provide in-house training or other less resource intensive methods. Identifying the best avenues for training which reduce barriers increase the likelihood of training occurring.

### CONSISTENT REMINDERS

Having a training plan in place is great but we all lead busy lives and are prone to distraction. Ensuring the city has a way of gently reminding officials of training opportunities keeps training at the top of mind. A common approach is to add training as a standing agenda item. This also encourages report outs. Other ways communities have met this include adding training fliers to all meeting packets or sending out a regular email focused on training. While events may not always be available, webinars and articles certainly are. To encourage consistent training, at least one RRC certified community holds a friendly competition between boards to see who can get the most training hours in each year. Some communities include a variety of training opportunities and avenues in their board and commission training manual. Currently, Westland has mentioned upcoming training opportunities at a few board meetings, but there is no established policy and it has not been done for all development-related boards. No matter what avenue the city chooses, Westland

## Best Practice 4.2—Education and training *continued*

should formally establish a consistent way to remind officials of upcoming training opportunities.

### TRAINING REPORT-OUTS

Asking members who take some type of training to report out to fellow officials helps share information and increases the city's return on its investment (time and monetary). Most communities address this by asking for report outs during general updates but some also ask for short written report outs to share with other members. Some also ask officials to share PowerPoints and notes. To meet this best practice, Westland should formally establish a method for board and commission members to report out about when they've learned at training.

### JOINT MEETINGS

While communities have master plans and common goals, it's easy to head in different directions when doing the day-to-day work. Even in smaller communities where officials may live next to each other or see each other at the grocery store, it's important to connect in an official capacity. Having a meeting with the council, planning commission, and the DDA at least annually gives the

community that chance to connect and ensure everyone is pulling in the same direction. Many communities combine a joint meeting with an in-house training component or hold the meeting to focus on a special topic or project. This allows communities to get on the same page about key community issues and projects.

### PLANNING COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA) required that the planning commission provide a report annually to the governing body on the commission's activities. Providing something as brief as a one-page memo satisfies the legal requirement under the MPEA. RRC encourages communities to use the report as a vehicle for incorporating a number of the other best practices such as identifying training priorities, reporting out on training activity, reviewing any development review feedback (see Best Practice 3 for details), and assessing progress on the master plan. Westland produces a "Planning Commission Annual Report" that includes information on rezoning requests, site plan approvals, special land use approvals, planned unit developments, and land divisions.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
<b>4.2.1</b>	The community has a dedicated source of funding for training.	✓	
<b>4.2.2</b>	The community identifies training needs and tracks attendance for elected and appointed officials and staff.	<input type="checkbox"/> Identify priorities for training topics and sources	Q3 2020
<b>4.2.3</b>	The community encourages elected and appointed officials and staff to attend trainings.	<input type="checkbox"/> Establish a way to consistently remind development-related board and commission members of upcoming training opportunities	Q3 2020
<b>4.2.4</b>	The community shares information between elected and appointed officials and staff.	<input type="checkbox"/> Establish a method to report out from training activity <input type="checkbox"/> Hold a joint meeting or training with council, planning commission and DDA at least annually	Q3 2020

## Best Practice 5.1—Economic development strategy

Best Practice 5.1 evaluates goals and actions identified by the community to assist in strengthening its overall economic health. Strategic economic development planning is critical to attract jobs and new investment in communities.

### LOCAL AND REGIONAL STRATEGY

The city's RRC self-evaluation indicated that the city does not have an economic development strategy. However, the city has been actively participating in the Southeast Michigan Council of Government's (SEMCOG) workshops to update the region's economic development strategy. Westland could take SEMCOG's 2016 "Partnering for Prosperity Economic Development Strategy" and use it to create an economic development strategy that fits the city's needs. However, Westland may want to hold off in creating an economic development strategy until SEMCOG's new economic development strategy is published. When the city does create an economic development strategy, it should not only be tied into the regional plan, but also the city's master

plan and capital improvements plan. An economic development strategy should identify economic opportunities and challenges in the community, which may already be identified in the master plan or regional planning documents. A key component of the economic development strategy is that it has recommendations for implementation, which include goals, actions, timelines and responsible parties. Again, any economic development strategy created for the city should align with the regional strategy.

### ASSESSING PROGRESS

The second aspect of this Best Practice focuses on ensuring the economic development strategy is reviewed on a regular basis. This ensures that the city's economic development goals and actions remain front of mind and so that it can correct course as needed to react to changing circumstances. To meet this Best Practice, the city will need to report progress on the implementation of the economic development strategy to the governing body annually.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
5.1.1	The community has approved an economic development strategy.	<input type="checkbox"/> Create an economic development strategy that meets all of the Best Practice 5.1.1 expectations	Q3 2021
5.1.2	The community annually reviews the economic development strategy.	<input type="checkbox"/> Once an economic development strategy has been created, annually report progress on the implementation of the strategy to the governing body	Q3 2021

## Best Practice 5.2—Marketing and promotion

Best Practice 5.2 evaluates how the community promotes and markets itself. Marketing and branding are essential tools in promotion of a community's assets and unique attributes. Consumers and investors are attracted to places that evoke positive feelings and to communities that take pride in their town and their history.

### MARKETING STRATEGY

Westland does not currently have a cohesive marketing strategy, but the city does have a logo, and may have an official color pallet and font. The city also uses the "In The W" TV show, press releases, and the WLND local cable station to promote the community; these can be aspects of a marketing strategy. RRC encourages the city to make that a citywide effort if possible.

When creating a marketing strategy, the city should focus on including the following:

1. An inventory of its existing marketing assets and partners, this could include listing out existing social media accounts, events in the city, core industries, reasons to visit, parks. Think about what's the city or DDA already doing to market? Is the city promoting itself at industry trade shows? Who else is out there marketing Westland?
2. Identify key audiences to focus on when attracting new residents, new businesses, and new development. For example, maybe encouraging accessory apartments could help existing residents bring family closer to together.

3. Identify key messages for each of those audiences—telling an average person that the city approves site plans quickly means almost nothing to them, sharing that same message but to a business owner looking to expand into a new market, could be appealing.

4. Identify key avenues for those messages. Social media is nice, but will it really hit those out-of-town developers who you might need to kickstart a priority site project? Probably not.
5. Identifying what success looks like. This way you know if you're on the right path or need to shift course.

Developing a formal brand and voice is a great marketing tool and something communities should strive for. However, it's not as effective as it could be without a strategy for getting the word out. A formal brand is also not required for RRC certification but is something communities commonly do create as part of the process.

### MUNICIPAL WEBSITE

A key aspect of any community's efforts to market itself and help foster development is its website. This is often the first point of contact with anyone looking to invest or visit. Westland's website is modern and aesthetically pleasing. It is easy to navigate and find most items. Key development-related items are easily found on the "Planning" and "Economic Development" sections of the website. The city should continue to keep the website up to date and add additional documents as they are created.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
5.2.1	The community has developed a marketing strategy.	<input type="checkbox"/> Develop a cohesive marketing strategy for the city that meets Best Practice 5.2.1	Q2 2021
5.2.2	The community has an updated, user-friendly municipal website.	✓	

## Best Practice 6.1—Redevelopment Ready Sites®

Best Practice 6.1 assesses how a community identifies, visions for and markets their priority redevelopment sites. Communities must think strategically about the redevelopment of properties and investments and those investments should be targeted in areas that can catalyze further development. Instead of waiting for developers to propose projects, Redevelopment Ready Communities® identify priority sites and prepare information to assist developers in finding opportunities that match the community's vision. It is best to begin working on identifying and prioritizing sites once a community has completed a majority of the previous best practices. When a community is ready to begin identifying priority redevelopment sites, the Redevelopment Services Team ([www.miplace.org/rsteam](http://www.miplace.org/rsteam)) will be available to assist communities in identifying sites that meet can help the community implement their vision.

### WESTLAND EXISTING PRIORITY SITES

Westland has identified the former city hall site as a priority redevelopment site but has not submitted any information related to it. The Norwayne Community was identified as a priority redevelopment area in the master plan, and Ford Road has also been identified as a priority redevelopment area. When selecting sites for redevelopment, it would be best if they were selected from priority redevelopment areas. However, RRC recommends that the city focus on the other five best practices before going further on this Best Practice. The Redevelopment Services Team will be available to assist the city in completing this once the previous five best practices are complete.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
6.1.1	The community identifies and prioritizes redevelopment sites.		
6.1.2	The community gathers basic information for at least three priority sites.		
6.1.3	The community has development a vision for at least three priority sites.	Complete the other five best practices.	
6.1.4	The community identifies potential resources and incentives for at least three priority sites.	Once those are complete, the RRC Team will connect the city with the Redevelopment Services Team to complete the remainder of this best practice.	
6.1.5	The community assembles a property information package for at least one priority site.		
6.1.6	Prioritized redevelopment sites are actively marketed in accordance with the marketing strategy.		

# Conclusion

The RRC program assists communities in maximizing their economic potential by embracing effective redevelopment tools and best practices. As this report makes clear, Westland has a strong foundation in place for meeting the best practices.

Upon receipt of this report, community staff and leadership should review the recommendations and determine if they align with the community's priorities and vision. If, after review, the community believes that RRC is still a good fit, council should pass a resolution of intent to continue with the process. Upon receipt of that resolution, the community will enter final phase of the process: officially working toward certification. During

that phase, the community will be able to make progress on RRC items at its own pace and receive regular support from its RRC planner. It will also have continued access to the RRC online library of resources and extensive network of other RRC-engaged communities while also becoming eligible for matching technical assistance dollars from RRC (once the community has shown at least one-quarter of progress). In order to guide this next phase, RRC recommends the creation of an RRC work group consisting of community staff, officials and community representatives. We look forward to working with the community on reaching certification and a long, positive partnership for many years to come.

