



MASTER PLAN AND ZONING ORDINANCE – WHAT’S THE DIFF?

City planning and land use regulation can often be confusing. Plans, ordinances, rules, policies, and procedures may sound similar but are, in fact, very different. As we move through the update of the Berkley Master Plan, it may be helpful to understand the role of the Master Plan document and how it impacts Ordinance regulations.

WHAT IS A MASTER PLAN?

A Master Plan is a long-term guiding policy document that expresses intent for the future of a community. It is not a law or a binding contract with a community. The plan projects out 5, 10, 15 years into the future and outlines the goals and objectives that the community would like to implement. Such goals and objectives are drafted after public engagement from the community, wherein residents, business owners, property owners, stakeholders, and elected and appointed officials express their wants, needs, interests, and hopes for the future.

A Master Plan includes analysis and recommendations on a community’s economy, housing, transportation, infrastructure, land use, and more. Such analysis and recommendations are based on input from the public garnered through a myriad of ways, such as surveys, public polls, stakeholder discussions, focus groups, open house forums, and more.

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires that a community’s Master Plan be reviewed once every five (5) years to ensure that the goals and objectives of the Plan align with what the residents and business owners want to see in their community.

A Master Plan is not a regulation and is not intended or expected to serve as law.

SO, WHAT IS A ZONING ORDINANCE?

A Zoning Ordinance is the law. It regulates land use, building size, form, placement, parcel area, width, depth, parking, landscaping, and more. It also includes consequences for violations, such as civil infraction tickets and fines.

The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act requires that the Zoning Ordinance shall be based on a plan. The Master Plan will influence the rules and regulations as a means to implement and fulfill the goals and objectives that were specified in the guiding policy document that was based on input from the public. Without updating the zoning ordinance, many planning goals may not be attainable.

Through the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act and the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, the Michigan legislatures have created a structure that allows communities to plan for the unknowable future and regulate existing land uses in the present.