



Certification Report

City of Lansing
October 2017

MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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

In October 2014, Lansing received a report of findings after being evaluated under the statewide RRC program. The report identified several areas the city needed to address prior to receiving RRC certification. Communities must demonstrate that all best practice evaluation criteria have been met to be awarded RRC certification.

Lansing is committed to the RRC best practices and has taken the necessary steps to ensure the city's long term competitiveness. The city council and planning board have worked diligently to bring their policies, procedures and plans up to date and in line with RRC best practice criteria. Lansing is a forward-thinking, collaborative community that has laid the groundwork for significant redevelopment and renewal. The city has been working persistently on meeting the goal and objectives described in the 2012 "Design Lansing Comprehensive Plan"; a thorough master plan that contains the city's downtown plan, public participation models, and economic development strategy. The city leverages the capacity of a number of capable and knowledgeable partners who can assist the city in becoming redevelopment ready, including the Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP), Greater Lansing Visitor's Bureau, and Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce to name a few. With this support, Lansing is in a prime position to achieve the economic development and marketing strategies it has planned for the future.

These strategies provide an excellent roadmap

toward increased investment in the community and the implementation of city goals and objectives. The implementation of city goals and objectives identified in the master plan can also be seen through actions like initiation of the Lansing Form Based Code project, the Shaping the Avenue transit-oriented development initiative, and the creation of the city's first capital improvements plan (CIP). The zoning ordinance is user-friendly, well-organized and contains flexible, streamlined development review processes, but with form-based code amendments for key districts on the horizon, the city may soon see an even greater level of flexibility. Priority sites have been identified and the former Deluxe Inn site, a key two-acre property serving as the gateway to REO town along Washington Avenue has been packaged with a depth of information that would assist a developer in making a determination on their potential future investment. The partnerships and collaborations established in Lansing serve to accomplish city goals and objectives in an efficient, well-organized fashion. These established relationships can be built upon in the future to address any new challenges and opportunities, thereby strengthening the entire Lansing area community.

The city should be proud of the hard work, achievements and transformations that have taken place over this three-year journey. Achieving RRC certification is a statement to the private sector that the city has a vision for the future and the development process is streamlined, predictable and user-friendly. It is important to acknowledge that the work does not end here. Moving forward, Lansing should build upon its successes by continuing to engage the public, strategically updating the master plan as it approaches its five-year review cycle, continuing to annually update the capital improvements plan, and proactively marketing prime redevelopment opportunities. RRC certification is effective for three years, provided the certification requirements are maintained throughout that time period.

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, observation 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; and website. Researchers observe the 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 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 outdated.

This report represents the final findings of the evaluation of the city of Lansing’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 a vision for redevelopment is embedded in the master plan, capital improvements plan, downtown plan and corridor plan. To comply with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008 and meet Best Practice 1.1 criteria, communities must maintain an updated master plan.

The “Design Lansing Master Plan” was adopted in 2012 and includes an updated vision and strategy for land use, economic development, placemaking, and community infrastructure. In the plan’s analysis of the data, it discusses specific issues and opportunities under each of these topics, which informs the implementation plans found later in this document. The development of the master plan was supported by a broad 77-member stakeholder advisory committee with public input gathered across a wide variety of methods and venues across the city. The outreach efforts to support this project has become the foundation for all future outreach efforts on planning and development. The master plan’s implementation section encompasses a thorough strategy for a range of topics and ensures accountability by stating realistic action steps, identifying responsible parties, and setting time-bound expectations. Goals such as focusing on mixed uses are supported by thoughtful objectives like encouraging a transition to walkable mixed-use development on urban connectors and supporting Old Town and REO Town as community mixed-use districts; essential strategies for being successful in the new economy by supporting the connections between business, talent, and place.

Lansing’s master plan provides the basis for its land use and zoning future by introducing fundamental concepts such as a zoning plan and future land use map. In addition, the plan identifies possible new land use strategies, such as the creation of form-based code districts that will build upon and contribute to Lansing’s unique sense of place. Each year since the plan’s adoption, the planning board has developed a statutorily required annual report that details important actions, activities, and historic preservation efforts the city has engaged in over the year. The report goes into detail about important planning and development projects occurring in the city, including the city’s form-based code project and Shaping the Avenue; a multi-jurisdictional transit-oriented

development project along the Michigan Avenue corridor.

A downtown plan is contained within the master plan and creates a strategy for redevelopment and reinvestment in the downtown. The plan was designed with an emphasis on businesses, residential and new city market opportunities, and it supports downtown Lansing’s Main Street initiative, outlines implementation strategies and prioritizes projects. These strategies address the essential components of an effective downtown plan, identifying the boundaries of the development area, thoroughly addressing projects with associated costs, and possibilities for mixed use. Strategies for Old Town and REO Town are also found in the plan, and it will be important for the city to work closely with their respective downtown development and Main Street organizations in the future to support economic development efforts in these centers of commerce and culture. Many of the items that fall within the realm of public improvements in the downtown plan are included in the city’s annually updated capital improvements plan.

A comprehensive capital improvements plan (CIP) is an essential tool for the planning and development of the social, physical and economic well-being of a community. Lansing has adopted a six year CIP as a stand-alone document, meeting the requirements of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. Capital projects are translated well from the master plan and have been prioritized while outlining potential sources of funding. The CIP, which is available via the planning commission’s web page, is used as a tool to implement the master plan and provides a link between planning and budgeting for capital projects. Projects such as sidewalk improvements and bike lanes for walk and bikeability are common needs expressed among each of these planning documents. Planning for future investment is not only a best practice for redevelopment readiness, but a CIP encourages project coordination internally and externally and assists with implementing the community vision established during the master planning process. The CIP can also influence and encourage future redevelopment and growth in Lansing, as public infrastructure projects identified in the CIP can be coordinated with proposed development projects to leverage private investment.

Best practice findings

Best Practice 1.1—The plans *continued*

Initial RRC evaluation Oct 2014	Final RRC evaluation Aug 2017	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The governing body has adopted a master plan in the past five years.	✓
		The master plan identifies a strategy for redevelopment or the governing body has adopted 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. Stakeholders are frequently engaged in the planning process and Lansing demonstrates that public participation efforts are proactive. Lansing maintains a number of resources on the city’s website that collectively meet the criteria for an RRC-approved public participation plan, including guidelines for social media across various platforms, how to connect with various departments on a range of stakeholder issues, and a how-to organizational guide for creating strong neighborhoods. Lansing’s master plan and form-based code development process clearly demonstrates its public engagement strategy has been and continues to be put into action by reporting on the results of various outreach methods.

Social media engagement, neighborhood workshops, and community surveys have been most commonly used to engage stakeholders on a variety of topics to a high degree of effectiveness. Lansing’s establishment of

the chief information officer position brings significant capacity to the city for internal and external IT activities, including fast and efficient updates to the city’s website. An example of this effectiveness was observed through the 25 workshops and over 1,000 surveys collected to engage stakeholders in the “Design Lansing Master Plan” process. Following the strategies suggested in the participation plan, the feedback received was processed and contributed to the strategies found in the master plan, many of which are seeing implementation today.

Communication on activities large and small are also proactively communicated through the city’s use of social media; particularly Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The city regularly uses these tools to keep citizens updated on community events, public notifications, and news concerning the area, and celebrating community pride through pictures. In addition, neighborhood leaders make public outreach a top priority by sharing a weekly e-newsletter on current activities and community services.

Initial RRC evaluation Oct 2014	Final RRC evaluation Aug 2017	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community has a public participation plan for engaging a diverse set of community stakeholders.	✓
		The community demonstrates that public participation efforts go beyond the basic methods.	✓
		The community shares outcomes of all public participation processes.	✓

Best practice findings

Best Practice 2.1—Zoning regulations

Best Practice 2.1 evaluates the community's zoning ordinance to determine how well it regulates for and implements the goals of the master plan. The city's zoning ordinance was already well organized, provided a clear process on common land use activities requiring a permit, and included all best practice criteria at the time of the report of findings. The ordinance is also made easily available online through Municode, which is accessible from the city's home page.

Although Lansing already satisfied all best practice criteria from 2.1 (Zoning Regulations) at the onset

of its participation in RRC, the city desired to take its placemaking efforts to a new level and leveraged RRC technical assistance to develop form-based code regulations for its high priority areas. At the time of this certification, the form-based code amendments were nearing completion and two public hearings had been held on the subject, but was still short of final adoption. As the city continues to work its way through the final stages of adopting these form-based standards, it should continue to educate property owners who fall within the purview of the new regulations.

Initial RRC evaluation Oct 2014	Final RRC evaluation Aug 2017	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The governing body has adopted a zoning ordinance that aligns with the goals of the current master plan.	✓
		The zoning ordinance is user-friendly and accessible online.	✓
		The zoning ordinance provides for areas of concentrated development in appropriate locations and encourages the type and form of development desired.	✓
		The zoning ordinance contains 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 includes flexible parking requirements.	✓
		The zoning ordinance includes standards for green infrastructure.	✓

Best Practice 3.1—Site plan review policy and procedures

Best Practice 3.1 evaluates the city's site plan review policies, project tracking and availability of development information. The framework for Lansing's site plan review process is clearly documented in the zoning ordinance and regulations identify Lansing's planning office as the party administratively responsible for site plan reviews. The building safety office is the primary intake department for applicants seeking a building permit, and so if a site plan review is required, the applicant is directed to the planning office for further assistance. The City of Lansing scored high marks under this best practice section at the time of its initial evaluation, missing only a method to track development projects and assurances that the stated development review timeline could be adhered to.

As of the city's second quarterly progress report which was submitted in June 2015, the tracking criteria was met through coordination with the Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP) via their project tracking tools, as well as the city's use of new development tracking software in the BS&A program. The use of this software in combination with the mayor's office weekly development meetings proactively confronted development review challenges that were common in the past to ensure projects met the expected timeline. This new forum provides an opportunity for developers, city leadership, and review officials to discuss potential problems before they become an impediment to the process.

Initial RRC evaluation Oct 2014	Final RRC evaluation Aug 2017	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		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.	✓
		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.	✓
		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.	✓

Best practice findings

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 stakeholders. For the process to work effectively, everyone involved must understand their role and responsibilities. Lansing has reorganized and updated relevant planning and development information into a comprehensive resource on development permit procedures. This excellent guide walks applicants through typical permitting activities; including policies and procedures, graphic flowcharts, the fee schedule,

departmental contact information, and links to applications. The guide has been used a top example for a RRC guide to development and shared with other RRC communities when looking for guidance on developing a resource like this.

The city’s fee schedule is updated annually to offset the true cost of typical zoning, building, and development related activities in Lansing. A listing of these fees are available under the building safety department’s commercial plan review page, along with many other helpful resources that potential applicants may need.

Initial RRC evaluation Oct 2014	Final RRC evaluation Aug 2017	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community maintains an online guide to development that explains policies, procedures and steps to obtain approvals.	✓
		The community annually reviews the fee schedule.	✓

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. A web-based application for open commission and committee seats is posted on the city's website and includes a series of questions to determine the applicant's background, relevant skills, and experience. A list of members of boards and commissions, as well as open seats is available on the website and regularly updated; the most current list being less than two months old.

To assist newly appointed board and commissions

officials with learning basic information about the structure and processes of government, development review process, and a particular board's role in the city achieving its goals and objectives; the city holds an official orientation training for newly appointed board members and provides them with resource documents that are relevant to their particular board, committee, or commission. An orientation training event such as this provides a high-level of interactivity with new members who may have questions about their assigned duties.

Initial RRC evaluation Oct 2014	Final RRC evaluation Aug 2017	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community sets expectations for board and commission positions.	✓
		The community provides orientation packets to all appointed and elected members of development related boards and commissions.	✓

Best practice findings

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 expand their knowledge and ultimately make more informed decisions about land use and redevelopment issues.

In Lansing, dedicated funding sources for trainings vary by department. Staff provides training to the city council, planning board and board of zoning appeals on an as needed basis, using web-based materials or information on file. Speakers from other organizations are occasionally invited to present to boards and commissions. The planning department has funding dedicated to training within the department budget. Trainings are reviewed as part of the annual budgeting process for the city and training is encouraged on a case-by-case basis to supplement areas where experience is lacking. Staff and officials are notified about upcoming educational opportunities and the city offers to pay for trainings that city officials are interested in. Results and lessons learned from these training sessions are reported back by attendees at regular meetings and administrative staff also provide updates to keep appointed leaders informed.

Tracking training is a useful way to identify future training needs by documenting education received, identifying gaps and determining what training should be focused on in the future. The city has developed a spreadsheet to log training attendance for boards, commissions and staff. Turnover in officials and staff can create gaps in knowledge about development, which makes ongoing training essential, and so all boards and

committees related to planning and development in Lansing should continue to be encouraged to attend future training sessions. Joint work sessions between boards and commissions are essential to foster communication and effectively address development issues. Joint meetings can also be used as a collaborative learning opportunity between public bodies on issues of mutual interest; particularly on topics related to development, multiple groups may see value in learning about new tools or concepts in a common setting. Lansing has found a value in organizing joint meetings to discuss activities like RRC, ongoing roles, and major projects of each board. At a past joint meeting, the planning board, economic development corporation, historic district commission, and Downtown Lansing, Inc. met to discuss opportunities for collaboration, and more joint activities have been scheduled since. Lansing's designation as an RRC Certified® community presents new opportunities for the city's boards and committees to collaborate on topics at the intersection of planning, zoning, economic development, and community design.

Lansing's 2016 planning department annual report to the city council is a clear and succinct overview of planning and development activities over the year. The report provides metrics on the permitting process, includes an overview of major planning and development initiatives, and shares details on historic preservation efforts. By providing this report, the city council is kept informed on the most important facts and accomplishments of the planning department over the year, bringing the city closer to achieving the goals expressed in the "Design Lansing Master Plan."

Initial RRC evaluation Oct 2014	Final RRC evaluation Aug 2017	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community has a dedicated source of funding for training.	✓
		The community identifies training needs and tracks attendance for the governing body, boards, commissions and staff.	✓
		The community encourages the governing body, boards, commissions and staff to attend trainings.	✓
		The community shares information between the governing body, boards, commissions and staff.	✓

Best Practice 5.1—Redevelopment Ready Sites®

Best Practice 5.1 assesses how a community identifies, visions and markets their priority redevelopment sites. The city coordinates with local partners to market its priority redevelopment sites; particularly the Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP) and CBRE Martin. Both LEAP and CBRE maintain databases of available development and redevelopment opportunities that are searchable for Lansing’s properties. Lansing’s master plan identifies the downtown core, REO Town, Old Town, 2000 block of Michigan Avenue, and downtown edge zones as focus areas for redevelopment. Separately from the plan, priority sites have been identified and include the former Deluxe Inn, a two-acre property dubbed the Gateway to REO Town; the Lake Trust Credit Union block in downtown Lansing; and a number of large vacant industrial parcels in prime locations. Detailed information has been gathered for these sites, including a property information package for the Gateway to REO Town site, which is showcased on the city’s website under

the planning office’s RRC page. The master plan describes the vision of the Washington Avenue corridor as a multimodal corridor that connects downtown to REO Town and clearly the right development on this site will be critical in achieving this vision.

City representatives and the LEAP work collaboratively to act as community champions for the priority sites. This continued collaboration is key to ensure both the effective recruitment of developers for these priority sites, and the implementation of projects that meet the community’s vision. Lansing’s property information package for the Gateway to REO Town and LEAP’s ZoomProspector listings should continue to be reviewed and updated occasionally and actively marketed to ensure their visibility through this partnership.

Information on development tools and incentives are provided on LEAP’s website under a page for local incentive programs and also on the city’s “Lansing Economic Development Corporation (LEDC)” page.

Initial RRC evaluation Oct 2014	Final RRC evaluation Aug 2017	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community identifies and prioritizes redevelopment sites.	✓
		The community gathers preliminary development information for prioritized redevelopment sites.	✓
		The community has developed a vision for the priority redevelopment site(s).	✓
		The community identifies available resources and incentives for prioritized redevelopment sites.	✓
		A “Property Information Package” for the prioritized redevelopment site(s) is assembled.	✓
		Prioritized redevelopment sites are actively marketed.	✓

Best practice findings

Best Practice 6.1—Economic development strategy

Best Practice 6.1 evaluates what goals and actions a community has identified to assist in strengthening its overall economic health. Today, economic development means more than business attraction and retention. Economic development is the process of building strong, adaptive communities and is critical to attract jobs, talent and new investment. Strategic economic development planning is critical to attract jobs and new investment in communities. Lansing's economic development strategy is thoroughly discussed in its master plan and emphasizes building competitiveness, focusing on mixed-uses, providing diverse job centers, focusing resources, and collaboration.

Focusing on placemaking and quality of life efforts, effectively marketing the city's assets, and encouraging adaptive reuse are noted as some of the city's top

priorities. This strategy identifies partners who could assist in the implementation of this strategy such as Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP), the Ingham County Land Bank, and Capital Area Transit Authority (CATA).

As part of the master plan, the economic development strategy is reexamined during the five-year review and the city participates in the creation of the region's "Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy" (CEDS), which is on a three-year cycle. The most recent planning commission annual report describes approved development projects like the BWL Substation, East Town Flats, and Marketplace Apartments, as well as the city's engagement in RRC and the multi-jurisdictional "Shaping the Avenue" initiative that are integral to the city's economic development future.

Initial RRC evaluation Oct 2014	Final RRC evaluation Aug 2017	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The governing body has approved an economic development strategy.	✓
		The governing body annually reviews the economic development strategy.	✓

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. In 2014 when Lansing’s report of findings was produced, Lansing had adopted several plans identifying a vision for the future and provided the steps for collaborative marketing with partner organizations. Beginning with the city’s website, the community section navigates a visitor to explore the wide range of assets Lansing has to offer; from community events, to overviews of the city’s many neighborhoods, to a directory of health and educational resources. Through this portal, the city connects to the Lansing Economic Area Partnership’s (LEAP) homepage which focuses on attracting and retaining talent to the Lansing region; LEAP’s website includes many highly effective marketing resources and a variety of videos that provide an introduction to the city. Notably the videos “26 Reasons to Live & Work in Lansing,” “Choose Greater Lansing,” and “Lansing Startup EcoSystem” provide compelling cases that suggest Lansing is a great place to

live and invest. Under LEAP’s resources page, a recently developed plan for southwest Lansing is maintained and contains detailed recommendations for marketing the assets of the city’s southwest quadrant. The city also provides links to the Greater Lansing Visitor’s Bureau, Downtown Lansing Inc., and Old Town Commercial Association which provide more specific marketing on their focus areas and subjects. Across Lansing’s many partner websites and marketing resources, a number of in-common implementation strategies are expressed, including: placemaking strategies, entrepreneurial support, strengthening existing neighborhoods, and community branding.

An updated, user-friendly municipal website allows for easy information gathering and a first positive experience for prospective consumers, business and investors. The city’s website encompasses a wealth of helpful resources for making it redevelopment ready, including links to documents the master plan, zoning ordinance, permit applications, guides, and connections to partners capable of assisting and promoting the city.

Initial RRC evaluation Oct 2014	Final RRC evaluation Aug 2017	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community has developed a marketing strategy.	✓
		The community has an updated, user-friendly municipal website.	✓

Conclusion

Lansing has exhibited a strong commitment to improving their redevelopment readiness and has worked diligently to meet the best practice criteria and achieve the Redevelopment Ready Certified Community® designation. The city has found a balance between removing unnecessary delays and hurdles, while preserving the integrity of the community's vision and goals, positioning the city for success. Lansing has set an example for the capital region as a leader in community revitalization. Certified communities signal a proactive, business friendly environment to developers and investors. Upon certification, the MEDC will assist in marketing a certified community's top three Redevelopment Ready Sites® if packaged to the best practice standard. Certified

communities with solid development projects receive priority for funding at the MEDC. RRC certification lasts for three years, if all best practice criteria are maintained and the city will be required to submit biannual progress reports to the RRC team.

In today's competitive economy, developers and businesses can invest anywhere. Certified Redevelopment Ready Communities® signal that locating a new business or growing an existing one within their municipality is straightforward. Lansing has removed barriers to development by streamlining the review process and improving customer service, to ensure the city remains a competitive and attractive community for business and talent attraction.



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) is the state's marketing arm and lead advocate for business development, talent and jobs, tourism, arts and cultural grants, and overall economic growth. The MEDC offers a number of business assistance services and capital programs for business attraction and acceleration, entrepreneurship, strategic partnerships, talent enhancement, and urban and community development.