



redevelopment ready  
communities®

# BEST PRACTICES



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**Program overview** ..... 3

**Best Practice One: Community Plans and Public Outreach**

    1.1—The plans..... 4

    1.2—Public participation..... 6

**Best Practice Two: Zoning Regulations**

    2.1—Zoning regulations..... 7

**Best Practice Three: Development Review Process**

    3.1—Development review procedures..... 10

    3.2—Guide to Development..... 13

**Best Practice Four: Recruitment and Education**

    4.1—Recruitment and orientation ..... 14

    4.2—Education and training ..... 15

**Best Practice Five: Redevelopment Ready Sites®**

    5.1—Redevelopment Ready Sites® ..... 16

**Best Practice Six: Community Prosperity**

    6.1—Economic development strategy..... 18

    6.2—Marketing and promotion ..... 19

**Conclusion** ..... 20





## If your community plans for future investment, invites public input, and offers superior customer service, then Redevelopment Ready Communities certification® is for you!

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation's Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) program works with Michigan communities seeking to streamline the development approval process by integrating transparency, predictability and efficiency into their daily development practices. RRC is a statewide program that certifies communities who actively engage stakeholders and plan for the future. RRC empowers communities to shape their future by assisting in the creation of a solid planning, zoning and development foundation to retain and attract businesses, investment and talent.

Through RRC, communities commit to improving redevelopment readiness by agreeing to undergo a rigorous assessment, and work to achieve a set of criteria as described in this document. Developed by public and private sector experts, the RRC best practices are the standard for evaluation. Each best practice addresses key elements of community and economic development. Evaluations are conducted by the RRC team through interviews, observation and data analysis. After the evaluation, a community is presented

with a report of findings that highlights successes and outlines recommended actions for implementation of missing best practice criteria. The expectations listed with each evaluation criteria are what a community is measured against to determine if that criteria is being accomplished. A community must demonstrate how the expectations are being achieved, and when applicable, may propose alternative approaches. To be awarded certification, a community must meet all RRC best practice criteria.

Redevelopment Ready Communities certification signals that a community has clear development policies and procedures, a community-supported vision, a predictable review process and compelling sites for developers to locate their latest projects. Once certified, the MEDC will assist in the promotion and marketing of up to three Redevelopment Ready Sites®. These packaged sites are primed for new investment because they are located within a community that has effective policies, efficient processes and the broad community support needed to get shovels in the ground.

In this document, parts of the best practices will have further explanation. If a word is in **orange**, hover your mouse over it and a yellow box will appear with more information. If a word is orange and **underlined**, it contains a hyperlink. Contact the RRC team at [RRC@michigan.org](mailto:RRC@michigan.org) with questions.

# Best Practice One: Community plans and public outreach

## 1.1—THE PLANS

Best Practice 1.1 evaluates community planning and how a community's redevelopment vision is embedded in the master plan, capital improvements plan, downtown plan and corridor plan. Comprehensive planning documents are a community's guiding framework for growth and investment. Information and strategies outlined in the plans are intended to serve as policy guidelines for local decisions about the physical, social, economic and environmental development of the community.

The master plan is updated, at a minimum, every five years to provide a community with a current and relevant decision making tool. The plan sets expectations

for those involved in development, giving the public some degree of certainty about their vision for the future, while assisting the community to achieve its stated goals. An updated master plan is essential to articulating the types of development the community desires and the specific areas where the community will concentrate resources. Coordination between the master plan, capital improvements plan, downtown plan and corridor plan is essential. It is important that planning documents incorporate recommendations for implementation, including goals, actions, timelines and responsible parties.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 1

The governing body has adopted a master plan in the past five years.

#### EXPECTATIONS

- The master plan reflects the community's desired direction for the future.
- The master plan identifies strategies for priority redevelopment areas.
- The master plan addresses land use and infrastructure, including complete streets elements.
- The master plan includes a zoning plan.
- The master plan incorporates recommendations for implementation, including goals, actions, timelines and responsible parties.
- Progress on the master plan is annually reported to the governing body.
- The master plan is accessible online.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 2

The governing body has adopted a downtown plan.

#### EXPECTATIONS

- The downtown plan identifies development area boundaries.
- The downtown plan identifies projects, and includes estimated project costs and a timeline for completion.
- The downtown plan includes mixed-use and pedestrian oriented development elements.
- The downtown plan addresses transit oriented development, if applicable.
- The downtown plan coordinates with the master plan and capital improvements plan.
- The downtown plan is accessible online.

# Best Practice One: Community plans and public outreach

## 1.1—THE PLANS *continued*

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 3

The governing body has adopted a **corridor plan**.

#### EXPECTATIONS

- The **corridor plan** identifies development area boundaries.
- The corridor plan identifies projects, and includes estimated project costs and a timeline for completion.
- The **corridor plan** includes mixed-use and pedestrian oriented development elements.
- The corridor plan addresses transit oriented development, if applicable.
- The corridor plan coordinates with the master plan and capital improvements plan.
- The corridor plan is accessible online.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 4

The governing body has adopted a capital improvements plan.

#### EXPECTATIONS

- The **capital improvements plan** details a minimum of six years of public structures and improvements and is reviewed annually.
- The capital improvements plan coordinates projects to minimize construction costs.
- The capital improvements plan coordinates with the master plan and budget.
- The capital improvements plan is accessible online.

# Best Practice One: Community plans and public outreach

## 1.2—PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Best Practice 1.2 assesses how well a community identifies its stakeholders and engages them, not only during the master planning process, but on a continual basis. A public participation strategy is essential to formalize those efforts and outline how the public will be engaged throughout planning and development processes.

Public participation is the process by which a community consults with interested or affected stakeholders before making a decision. It is two-way communication and collaborative problem solving with the objective of being intentionally inclusive, and the goal

of achieving better and more acceptable decisions. Public participation aims to prevent or minimize disputes by creating a process for resolving issues before they become an obstacle.

The best plans and proposals have the support of many stakeholders from businesses, residents, community groups and elected and appointed community officials. Public engagement should be more frequent and interactive than only soliciting input during the master plan update and public hearings.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 1

The community has a **public participation strategy** for engaging a diverse set of community stakeholders.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The strategy identifies **key stakeholders**, including those not normally at the visioning table.
- The strategy describes public participation methods and the appropriate venue to use each method.
- If a third party is consulted, they adhere to the public participation strategy.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 2

The community demonstrates that public participation efforts go beyond the basic methods.

### EXPECTATIONS

- Basic practices:**
  - **Open Meetings Act**
  - Website posting
  - Postcard mailings
  - Local cable notification
  - Newspaper posting
  - Flier posting on community hall door
  - Attachments to water bills
  - Announcements at governing body meetings
- Proactive practices:**
  - Individual mailings
  - Community workshops
  - Social networking
  - One-on-one interviews
  - Charrettes
  - Canvassing
  - Focus groups
  - **Crowd-sourcing**

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 3

The community shares outcomes of public participation processes.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community tracks success of various outreach methods.
- The community participation results are communicated in a consistent and transparent manner.

# Best Practice Two: Zoning regulations

## 2.1—ZONING REGULATIONS

Best Practice 2.1 evaluates a community’s zoning ordinance and how well it regulates for the goals of the master plan.

Zoning is a key tool for plan implementation. Inflexible or obsolete zoning regulations can discourage development and investment. Outdated regulations can

force developers to pursue rezoning or variance requests, extending project timelines, increasing costs and creating uncertainty. Communities should look to streamline ordinances and regulate for the kind of development that is truly desired. In addition, zoning is an essential tool for shaping inviting, walkable, vibrant communities.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 1

The governing body has adopted a zoning ordinance that aligns with the goals of the master plan.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community has evaluated the master plan’s recommendations to determine if changes to the zoning map or ordinance are needed.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 2

The zoning ordinance provides for areas of concentrated development in appropriate locations and encourages the type and form of development desired.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The ordinance allows mixed-use by right in designated areas of concentrated development.
- The community has reviewed the ordinance to consider how **form-based zoning** could help achieve community goals.
- The ordinance requires one or more of the following **elements** in areas of concentrated development:
  - Build-to lines
  - Open store fronts
  - Outdoor dining
  - Minimum ground floor transparency
  - Streetscape elements (trees, seating, pedestrian-scale lighting and signage)
- The ordinance allows for preservation of sensitive historic and environmental features.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 3

The zoning ordinance includes flexible tools to encourage development and redevelopment.

### EXPECTATIONS

- Special land use and conditional zoning approval procedures and requirements are clearly defined.
- Commercial and industrial districts allow for related compatible uses that serve **new economy-type** businesses.

# Best Practice Two: Zoning regulations

## 2.1—ZONING REGULATIONS *continued*

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 4

The zoning ordinance allows for a variety of housing options.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The ordinance allows for two or more of the following **non-traditional housing types**:
  - Accessory dwelling units
  - Attached single-family units
  - Stacked flats
  - Live/work
  - Residential units above non-residential uses
  - Co-housing
  - Corporate temporary housing
  - Cluster housing
  - Micro units

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 5

The zoning ordinance includes standards to improve non-motorized transportation.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community understands the benefits of walkable and transit oriented development and has standards for the following elements where appropriate:
  - Bicycle parking
  - Traffic calming
  - Pedestrian-scale lighting
  - Public realm standards
- The community understands the benefits of **connectivity** and has **ordinance requirements** that accommodate pedestrian activity within and around development.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 6

The zoning ordinance includes flexible parking standards.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The ordinance includes regulations for two or more of the following:
  - Reduction or elimination of required parking when on-street and public parking is available
  - Connections between parking lots
  - Shared parking agreements
  - Parking maximums
  - Parking waivers
  - Electric vehicle charging stations
  - Bicycle parking
  - Payment in lieu of parking
  - Reduction of required parking for complementary mixed-uses



# Best Practice Two: Zoning regulations

## 2.1—ZONING REGULATIONS *continued*

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 7

The zoning ordinance includes standards for green infrastructure.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The ordinance includes regulations for one or more of the following:
  - Rain gardens, bioswales and other low impact development techniques
  - Green roofs
  - Pervious pavement
  - Landscaping that encourages or requires use of native, non-invasive species
  - Preservation of existing trees
- The community recognizes the benefits of street trees and parking lot landscaping to mitigate the impacts of heat island effects.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 8

The zoning ordinance is user-friendly.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The ordinance portrays clear definitions and requirements.
- The ordinance is available in an electronic format at no cost. Hard copies are available for review at convenient locations.
- The ordinance is accessible online.

# Best Practice Three: Development review process

## 3.1—DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCEDURES

Best practice 3.1 evaluates the community’s development review policies and procedures, project tracking and internal/external communication.

The purpose of the development review process is to assure plans for specific types of development comply with local ordinances and are consistent with the master plan. Streamlined, well-documented development policies and procedures ensure a smooth and predictable experience when working with a community. It is essential for a community’s development review team to also coordinate with permitting and inspections staff.

Unnecessary steps or unclear instructions increase time

and expenses associated with development. Community leaders should look to simplify and clarify policies, operate in a transparent manner and increase efficiency to create an inviting development climate that is vital to attracting investment. To do this, sound internal procedures need to be in place and followed. Tracking projects internally across multiple departments can alleviate potential delays. Offering conceptual site plan review meetings is one more step a community can take to show investors they are working to remove development barriers and cut down on unexpected time delays.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 1

The zoning ordinance articulates a thorough site plan review process.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The responsibilities of the governing body, planning commission, zoning board of appeals, other reviewing bodies, and staff are clearly documented.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 2

The community has a qualified intake professional.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community identifies a project point person and trains staff to perform intake responsibilities including:
  - Receiving and processing applications and site plans
  - Documenting contact with the applicant
  - Explaining procedures and submittal requirements
  - Facilitating meetings
  - Processing applications after approval
  - Excellent customer service

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 3

The community defines and offers **conceptual site plan review** meetings for applicants.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community has clearly defined expectations posted online and a checklist to be reviewed at conceptual meetings.

# Best Practice Three: Development review process

## 3.1—DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCEDURES *continued*

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 4

The community encourages a developer to seek input from neighboring residents and businesses at the onset of the application process.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community **assists the developer** in soliciting input on a proposal early in the site plan approval process as detailed in the public participation strategy.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 5

The appropriate departments engage in **joint site plan reviews**.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The joint site plan review team consists of the following representatives, as appropriate:
  - Planning department
  - Public works department
  - Building department
  - Transportation department
  - Fire
  - Police
  - Assessor
  - Community manager or supervisor
  - Economic development
  - Historic District Commission
  - Consultant
  - Attorney
  - County soil erosion and sedimentation
  - County drain commissioner
  - County health department
  - County road commission
  - Outside agencies

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 6

The community has a clearly documented internal staff review policy.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The internal review process articulates clear roles, responsibilities and timelines.
- Development review standards are clearly defined.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 7

The community promptly acts on **development requests**.

### EXPECTATIONS

- Site plans for permitted uses are approved administratively or by the planning commission.
- The community follows its documented procedures and timelines.
- The community has easy to follow flowcharts of development processes that include timelines.
- Community development staff coordinates with permitting and inspections staff to ensure a smooth and timely approval process.

# Best Practice Three: Development review process

## 3.1—DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCEDURES *continued*

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 8

The community has a method to track development projects.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community uses a **tracking mechanism** for projects during the development process.
- The community uses a tracking mechanism for projects during the permitting and inspections process.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 9

The community annually reviews successes and challenges with the development review process.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community **obtains customer feedback** on the site plan approval and permitting and inspections process and integrates changes where applicable.
- The joint site plan review team, including permitting and inspections staff, meets to capture lessons learned and amends the process accordingly.

# Best Practice Three: Development review process

## 3.2—GUIDE TO DEVELOPMENT

Best Practice 3.2 evaluates the accessibility of a community’s planning and development information.

Development information and applications must be assembled to help citizens, developers and public officials gain a better understanding of how the development

process in the community works. Documents should be updated regularly and provide a general overview of development processes, steps necessary to obtain approvals and be readily available online.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 1

The community maintains a guide to development that explains policies, procedures and steps to obtain approvals.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The guide includes:
  - Relevant contact information
  - Relevant meeting schedules
  - Easy-to-follow step-by-step flowcharts of development processes, including timelines
  - Conceptual meeting procedures
  - Relevant ordinances to review prior to site plan submission
  - Site plan review requirements and application
  - Clear explanation for site plans that can be approved administratively
  - Rezoning request process and application
  - Variance request process and application
  - Special land use request process and application
  - Fee schedule
  - Special meeting procedures
  - Financial assistance tools
  - Design guidelines and related processes
  - Building permit requirements and applications
- The guide to development is accessible online.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 2

The community annually reviews the fee schedule.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The fee schedule is updated to cover the community’s true cost to provide services.
- The community accepts credit card payment for fees.

# Best Practice Four: Recruitment and education

## 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.

Diversity on boards and commissions can ensure a wide range of perspectives are considered when making

decisions on development and financial incentives.

Communities should seek applicants with desired skill sets and establish expectations prior to new officials and board members becoming active.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 1

The community sets expectations for board and commission positions.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community outlines expectations and **desired skill sets** for open seats.
- Board and commission applications are available online.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 2

The community provides orientation packets to all appointed and elected members of development related boards and commissions.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The **orientation packet** includes all relevant planning, zoning and development information.

# Best Practice Four: Recruitment and education

## 4.2—EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Best practice 4.2 assesses how a community encourages ongoing education and training and tracks training needs for appointed or elected officials, board members and staff.

Planning commissioners, zoning board of appeals members, the governing body and staff make more informed development decisions when they receive

adequate training on land use and development issues. Turnover in officials and staff can create gaps in knowledge, which makes ongoing training essential to the efficient functioning of a community's development processes.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 1

The community has a dedicated source of funding for training.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community has a training budget allocated for elected and appointed officials and staff.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 2

The community identifies training needs and tracks attendance for elected and appointed officials and staff.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community manages a simple tracking mechanism for logging individual training needs and attendance.
- The community identifies trainings that assist in accomplishing their stated goals and objectives.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 3

The community encourages elected and appointed officials and staff to attend trainings.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community consistently notifies its elected and appointed officials and staff about training opportunities.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 4

The community shares information between elected and appointed officials and staff.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community holds collaborative work sessions, including joint trainings on development topics.
- Training participants share information with those not in attendance.
- The planning commission prepares an annual report for the governing body.

# Best Practice Five: Redevelopment Ready Sites®

## 5.1 — REDEVELOPMENT READY SITES®

Best practice 5.1 assesses how a community identifies, visions for and markets priority redevelopment sites. A redevelopment ready site is a site targeted by the community and ready for investment.

Identifying and marketing priority sites can assist a community to stimulate the real estate market for obsolete, vacant and underutilized property.

Communities that have engaged the public and determined desired outcomes for priority sites create a predictable environment for development projects. A community which takes steps to reduce the risk of

rejected development proposals will entice hesitant developers to spend their time and financial resources pursuing a project in their community. If a development proposal on a priority site is deemed controversial, additional public participation opportunities should be held to ensure community support. To encourage development, it is essential that communities actively package and market sites prioritized for redevelopment. Developers look to invest in places that have an overall vision for the community and priority sites.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 1

The community identifies and prioritizes redevelopment sites.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community maintains an updated list of priority sites to be redeveloped.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 2

The community gathers basic information for prioritized redevelopment sites.

### EXPECTATIONS

- Required information to include:
  - Photo of the site and/or rendering
  - Desired development outcomes for the site
  - Owner contact information
  - Community contact information
  - Zoning
  - Lot size
  - Building size
  - State equalized value
  - Utilities on site: Water, sewer, electricity, natural gas
  - Wired broadband infrastructure: DSL, cable, fiber

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 3

The community has developed a vision for the priority redevelopment sites.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The vision includes desired development outcomes.
- Community champions for redevelopment of the site are identified.
- High controversy redevelopment sites may require additional public engagement.



# Best Practice Five: Redevelopment Ready Sites®

## 5.1 — REDEVELOPMENT READY SITES® *continued*

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 4

The community identifies **potential resources and incentives** for prioritized redevelopment sites.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The community identifies negotiable development tools, financial incentives and/or in-kind support, based on the project meeting the community's vision and desired development outcomes.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 5

Property information packages for prioritized sites are assembled.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The property information package includes basic information and the following as applicable:
  - Available financial incentives
  - Deed restrictions
  - Property tax assessment information
  - Property survey
  - Previous uses
  - Existing conditions report
  - Known environmental and/or contamination conditions
  - Soil conditions
  - Demographic data
  - Surrounding amenities
  - Planned infrastructure improvements as identified in CIP
  - GIS information including site location and street maps
  - Natural features map
  - Traffic studies
  - Target market analysis or feasibility study results
  - Market studies

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 6

Prioritized redevelopment sites are actively marketed.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The property information packages are accessible online.

# Best Practice Six: Community prosperity

## 6.1—ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Best practice 6.1 assesses 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. While business development is a core value, a community needs to include community development and talent in the

overall equation for economic success. The goal of the economic development strategy is to provide initiatives and methods that will encourage diversity of the region's economic base, tap into opportunities for economic expansion and help to create a sustainable, vibrant community.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 1

The community has an approved **economic development strategy**.

### EXPECTATIONS

- The economic development strategy is part of the master plan, annual budget or a separate document.
- The economic development strategy connects to the master plan and capital improvements plan.
- The economic development strategy identifies the economic opportunities and challenges of the community.
- The economic development strategy incorporates **recommendations for implementation**, including goals, actions, timelines and responsible parties.
- The economic development strategy coordinates with a regional economic development strategy.
- The economic development strategy is accessible online.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 2

The community annually reviews the economic development strategy.

### EXPECTATIONS

- Progress on the economic development strategy is reported annually to the governing body.

# Best Practice Six: Community prosperity

## 6.2—MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Best practice 6.2 assesses how a community promotes and markets itself to create community pride and increase investor confidence. It also evaluates the ease of locating pertinent planning, zoning and economic development documents on the community’s website.

Community marketing and promotion can take many forms. Communities must develop a positive, promotional strategy through marketing campaigns,

advertising and special events to encourage investment. Marketing campaigns can assist with sharing the established community vision, values and goals.

Developing a brand to promote a consistent identity can position a community for future success. A community’s website is an important marketing tool and must be well-designed to provide information to the public and build a positive image.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 1

The community has developed a [marketing strategy](#).

#### EXPECTATIONS

- The marketing strategy identifies opportunities and outlines specific steps to attract businesses, consumers and real estate development to the community.
- The marketing strategy strives to create or strengthen an image for the community.
- The marketing strategy identifies approaches to market priority development sites.
- The community coordinates marketing efforts with local, regional and state partners.

### EVALUATION CRITERIA 2

The community has an updated, user-friendly municipal website.

#### EXPECTATIONS

- The community’s website is easy to navigate.
- The community’s planning, zoning and development information is grouped together with links to the following:
  - Master plan and amendments
  - Downtown plan
  - Corridor plan
  - Capital improvements plan
  - Zoning ordinance
  - Guide to development
  - Online payment option
  - Partner organizations
  - Board and commission applications
  - Property information packages
  - Economic development strategy

# Conclusion

The Redevelopment Ready Communities® program looks to foster communities that creatively reuse space, embrace economic innovation and proactively plan for the future, making them more attractive for investments that create places where talent wants to

live, work and play. RRC certification signals to business owners, developers and investors that the community has removed barriers by building deliberate, fair and consistent processes.



Communities not formally engaged in the RRC program, but wanting to work toward certification are encouraged to compare their current policies and procedures to the best practice standards by completing RRC self-evaluations. The self-evaluations are available to assist any community interested in being more redevelopment ready. Completion of the self-evaluation documents does not replace the formal evaluation process conducted by the RRC team. In addition to the self-evaluations, guides have been developed to act as resources for communities working on RRC best practice components. Each guide is a tool describing recommended processes and sample language. Every community has different needs and capacities, so the process and document can be tailored to fit individual community requirements.

To be vibrant and competitive, Michigan communities must be ready for development. This involves planning for new investment, identifying assets and opportunities and focusing limited resources. Communities must create the types of places where talent and businesses want to locate, invest and expand.

Certified Redevelopment Ready Communities® signal that locating a new business or growing an existing one is straightforward. Certified communities have removed barriers to development including eliminating uncertainties surrounding project timelines and approvals by implementing and executing the RRC best practices.

Contact the RRC team at [rrc@michigan.org](mailto:rrc@michigan.org) or your CATeam specialist with questions.