

# MICHIGAN PLANNER



Michigan Chapter  
American Planning Association

Financial assistance for this issue of the *Michigan Planner* magazine was provided by EGLE through the U.S. Department of Energy's Reliable Energy Siting through Technical Engagement and Planning grant.

## POWER, POLICY, & PLACE

Navigating Renewable Energy in Michigan

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## MAP is Everywhere!

Getting the word out about the value of planning – at the state, regional, county and local levels – has long been a high priority of the Michigan Association of Planning. When our parent organization (the American Planning Association [APA]) launched their Voice of Planning initiative in 2024 we were thrilled to integrate their reinforcing messages into our campaign.

Amplifying the value of planning beyond our membership is no small feat. So many to reach, so few hours in the day. And your small but mighty staff of 7 here at the MAP office, along with the Board of Directors and a robust volunteer committee cohort, is up to the task. Probably the most important element of our strategy is direct touch with planning and ancillary professionals, officials, and key stakeholders. We achieve this by proactively introducing MAP and planning to individuals, organizations and agencies that we know would benefit from the unique benefits of our profession.

One successful method is to contribute our expertise to the agendas of partner organizations' events, and increasingly we are asked to take the podium to share planning expertise. With 4 AICP planners on our staff, we are equipped to cover most any topic.

2026 is off to a strong start. We've been invited to present at several upcoming events including the Michigan Downtown Association (MDA) Spring Workshop (Planning for an Inclusive, and Safe, Downtown on March 4); the Building Michigan Communities Conference (BMCC) (Know Thyself: Getting Housing Ready, May 12 and The Deliverables of Inclusive Design and Community Planning, May 13); and SEMCOG's Planning for Flooding Resilience Workshop (Resilience Planning and Zoning, February 3).

MAP staff appearances in 2025 included Planning and Zoning clinics in East Bay Township and Detroit in October; an invitation from Lake County, IL to talk about Michigan's regional strategy to tackle housing supply; and a request from the Chicago Fed to highlight use of data to better understand how the housing landscape is changing. We've become a go-to source not just in Michigan, but in the upper-Midwest!

MAP also continues its commitment to advancing our Pro Housing Policies and have many new friends with MSHDA Regional Housing Partnership leaders. We provided content expertise to various RHP Housing Summits and events including Region K in partnership with MSUE; presentations for 3 years straight on Housing Norths' Summit agenda in Region D; Region H in December 2024; and Region M, Macomb County in November 2025. On the horizon in late spring 2026 is Region N, Wayne County. We also provide technical assistance and plan and ordinance assessments in Region H, teeing communities up to work with planning consultants to update the plans and codes.

The MAP Board throughout 2025 advanced its policy initiative to create a framework for Michigan's future founded in planning best practices by connecting with members and other leaders and planned a robust schedule of outreach and engagement for the upcoming year at their annual retreat in late January 2026. See page 16 for details.

Finally, The American Planning Association brings its National Planning Conference (NPC) to Detroit from April 25 to 28, 2026 and Michigan planning will be broadcast to the biggest gathering of planners to convene Michigan at one time ever. Planners from the City of Detroit and surrounding communities have worked closely with APA to develop an incredible program that includes a variety of mobile workshops, and dozens of Michigan sessions were selected by APA for breakouts. MAP is hosting a Michigan Chapter reception on Sunday April 26, 2026 from 5:30 to 7:00 at Grand Trunk Pub at 612 Woodward. Everyone is welcome and invited even if you are not attending Apa NPC 2026. Registration is required and details are at [www.planningmi.org](http://www.planningmi.org).

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Solar Panels in Ypsilanti by Gerville



# Power, Policy, and Place

## Navigating Renewable Energy in Michigan

Local governments occupy a unique and critical role, serving as the primary bridge between large-scale infrastructure projects and the communities they inhabit. Local officials are the first point of contact for developers and act as the stewards of what many describe as a “once-in-a-lifetime” economic opportunity--the hosting of solar, wind, and battery storage facilities, local governments can unlock millions in new revenue to fund schools, emergency services, and infrastructure.

Leaders must balance fiscal responsibility, ensuring equitable tax burdens while maximizing public benefits and leveraging additional revenue like community benefits agreements or EGLE's renewable energy permitting grants.

In 2025, the federal government repealed significant clean energy provisions. Despite this repeal, Michigan has solidified its commitment through 2023 climate laws that mandate 100% clean electricity by 2040. And technology has improved making clean energy the cheapest source of new electric generation. These are a lot of contradictory balls being tossed in the air that local government must manage.

Local planners and officials review applications full of technical documentation, requiring months of intensive review involving sound modeling, decommissioning plans, and environmental impact studies. Planners and local officials are essential mediators who ensure that clean energy respects local short-term and long-term goals.

This issue of the *Michigan Planner* magazine is provided by EGLE through the U.S. Department of Energy's Reliable Energy Siting through Technical Engagement and Planning grant. Inside are articles from the state's energy experts on the state of solar and wind energy in the state along with strategies that local officials and planners can take to manage these projects.

Solar Array Alpena Community College



# Balancing Power and Place

How Northeast Michigan Communities Are Navigating Renewable Energy Zoning

Over the past two decades, the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments (NEMCOG) has partnered with more than 60 communities to write new zoning ordinances and modernize existing ones. That experience has proven invaluable as renewable energy development accelerates across the region. With a growing number of projects proposed—and the passage of Public Act 33 of 2023 reshaping the regulatory landscape—NEMCOG has been working closely with local governments across an 11-county area to ensure communities fully understand their zoning options for renewable energy.

The collective challenge is how to effectively integrate large-scale renewable energy facilities while preserving local character, protecting farmland, and respecting both participating and nonparticipating property owners. Municipal leaders across Northeast Michigan have engaged in extensive and often difficult discussions to strike a balance between local control and the State of Michigan’s renewable energy goals.

Under state law, communities face three pathways. They may choose to take no local action and allow the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) to

make all siting decisions. They may adopt a Compatible Renewable Energy Ordinance (CREO), which is no more restrictive than state standards. Or they may adopt a locally tailored “workable ordinance”—one that remains amenable to developers while imposing standards that are, in some cases, more stringent than those required by the state.

To date, none of the communities working with NEMCOG have opted to leave all renewable energy approvals to the MPSC. Instead, the majority have chosen the “workable ordinance” approach, seeking to retain a meaningful role in

decision-making. That choice has not come easily. Renewable energy development is complex, highly technical, and often occurs at a geographic scale far larger than what most communities are prepared for. The state-level approval pathway has resulted in additional pressure, requiring communities to carefully develop reasonable regulations in order to retain some degree of local approval and oversight as opposed to approval being granted by the MPSC.

What has emerged are three regulatory approaches adopted by communities across Northeast Michigan.

#### *Option 1: A Workable Ordinance with No Geographic Restrictions*

Before engaging individual communities, NEMCOG developed a template for a renewable energy ordinance amendment adapted from earlier zoning work on wind energy. The template also drew from *Planning and Zoning for Solar Energy Systems and Planning and Zoning for Battery Energy Storage Systems*, published by the University of Michigan's Graham Sustainability Institute Center for Empowering Communities. To foster

collaboration, NEMCOG invited renewable energy developers to review the draft and provide feedback on whether it would be considered "workable" from an industry perspective.

The resulting ordinance—now adopted or in the process of adoption by numerous municipalities—addresses the standards outlined in state law and also addresses a number of other issues which are important to the community. In some instances, communities have chosen to align closely with the standards in Public Act 33, while others have adopted standards that are modestly more restrictive. For example, some municipalities have increased solar panel setbacks, recognizing that doing so typically requires a larger land area. More commonly, communities have required greater setbacks for battery energy storage systems.

Flexibility is a hallmark of these ordinances. Screening requirements allow communities to require or waive visual buffering depending on conditions along specific property lines. Sound limits are often measured at the lot line of

nonparticipating properties rather than at building walls. Additional standards address land clearing, access drives, shadow flicker from wind turbines, and the protection of actively farmed land.

The ordinances also include detailed application requirements, such as decommissioning plans, emergency response plans, pre-development sound modeling, and technical studies related to stormwater runoff, environmental impacts, visual character, and groundwater. Post-approval documentation requirements ensure ongoing compliance.

Typically, accessory wind and solar uses are permitted in most zoning districts, while utility-scale renewable energy facilities are treated as special uses in Agricultural and Industrial Districts, requiring them to meet discretionary special use standards. While these uses are only allowed in specific zoning districts, no other geographic restrictions are included. A few of the NEMCOG-member communities that have adopted variations of this approach include Allis Township, Presque Isle Township, Sanborn Township,



# **Call for Sessions**

## **Planning Michigan Conference 2026**

### **Kalamazoo Radisson | September 30 to October 2**

**The Planning Michigan Conference Committee will consider sessions that demonstrate exemplary planning examples, have clear learning objectives and provide practical ways to implement. Attendees want to know how to apply best practices and strategies in their communities. Sessions that are geared toward Ethics, Law, or Equity and are encouraged.**

**Sessions are one hour fifteen minutes in length. Sessions will have a moderator to introduce the speakers and keep the session on schedule. Deadline is April 10, 2026.**

**Submit your session proposal at [www.planningmi.org](http://www.planningmi.org)!**

Ossineke Township, the City of Alpena, the City of Gaylord, Albert Township, Briley Township, Beaver Creek Township, Charter Township of AuSable, and Baldwin Township.

### *Option 2: A Workable Ordinance with Geographic Restrictions*

Throughout NEMCOG's discussions with local officials, one concern has consistently risen to the top: the loss of farmland and its long-term implications for food production and the agricultural heritage of Northeast Michigan. In response, several communities have adopted modified versions of the workable ordinance that include reasonable geographic restrictions.

Green Township in Alpena County, whose master plan emphasizes the importance of agriculture, established an overlay district where solar facilities are permitted. Covering more than half of the township, the overlay district includes portions of the Farm and Forest and Agricultural Districts while avoiding the most productive farmland. The boundaries were determined through an analysis of prime agricultural soils and actively farmed areas.

Wilson Township, also in Alpena County, designated a similar overlay district in the northeastern portion of the township. Sherman Township in Iosco County designated an area where both solar facilities and battery energy storage systems are permitted, focusing on open land with minimal forest and minimal wetland coverage. Reno Township in Iosco County took a different approach, establishing a cap of 1,400 acres for solar and battery development—a level the community felt would support renewable energy while preserving agricultural land for food production.

### *Option 3: Adopting a CREO*

Thus far, only one community working with NEMCOG has chosen to adopt a Compatible Renewable Energy Ordinance. That township based its CREO on a model

provided by the Michigan Townships Association and adopted it prior to Public Act 33 taking effect.

Since then, the township has retained NEMCOG to begin a comprehensive zoning ordinance rewrite. As the process has unfolded—and after learning about neighboring communities where developers have successfully worked within the framework of locally adopted workable ordinances—the township is now considering rescinding the CREO in favor of a more customized approach.

The communities of Northeast Michigan have faced this difficult issue head on with a great deal of thoughtful consideration of the needs of community residents on both sides of the renewable issue. NEMCOG works with member communities on a wide range of issues; if you are located in NEMCOG's area and want to learn more, please reach out. For folks located outside of NEMCOG, know that your regional planning agency stands ready to assist with data, studies and other resources to assist you in making the best decisions possible.

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**Denise Cline** is the Deputy Director and Chief Planner of the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments. She has worked at NEMCOG for more than 21 years, specializing in zoning, planning, GIS mapping, and Pure Michigan Byways, among many other initiatives. Over the course of her career, she has assisted approximately 65 communities within and outside of the region with zoning ordinance development.



## Embrace the Spirit of Detroit

The American Planning Association's National Planning Conference is coming to Detroit, April 25-28

Join APA in Detroit and immerse yourself in an inspiring network of peers that will empower you to build the future of planning.

The Detroit Host Committee has been working hard with APA to ensure that Orientation Tours, Mobile Workshops and Local Sessions highlight the important planning work happening in and around Detroit.

The Michigan Association of Planning is hosting a reception Sunday, April 26.

To register for the national conference, go to [www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org)

For information on MAP activities, including the reception, go to [www.planningmi.org](http://www.planningmi.org)

# Michigan Association of Planning's 2026 Training Workshop for Planning & Zoning Officials

In Person trainings include a light meal.

## PLANNING & ZONING ESSENTIALS

March 18 | 11:30 AM to 4:30 PM | Frankenmuth

March 25 & 26 | 6 PM to 8 PM | Online

This 4-hour program is a robust introduction for new planning commissioners and zoning board of appeals members, but also a great refresher for more experienced officials looking to build upon existing knowledge. Public hearing procedures, site plan review, master planning, zoning ordinances, variances, how to determine practical difficulty, and standards for effective decision-making are covered. Course includes a guidebook.

## MAKING RENEWABLES ADD UP

March 5 | 3 PM to 4:30 PM | Online

This Renewable Energy Academy webinar offers key resources and practical strategies for communities and planners to address the financial opportunities and responsibilities of hosting renewables. Discover how to evaluate and harness municipal revenue streams, utilize innovative tools to estimate location-specific community benefits, and analyze zoning trade-offs.

## BUILDING YOUR COMMUNITY'S LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

March 11 | 3 PM to 5 PM | Online

Many government actions require quorums and government business can grind to a halt without enough people. Learn how governments can work smarter, not harder. Make meetings more productive so people want to be appointed, while also widening the circle of possible appointees.

## CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PLANNING

March 18 | 5:30 PM to 8:30 PM | Frankenmuth

This program explain everything you need to know to prepare and adopt a Capital Improvement Program, including: who should be involved in the Capital Improvement Program process; the accounting and budgetary requirements of a CIP; and how to tie the program into your infrastructure capacity. Course includes a guidebook.

## GETTING THE DEVELOPMENT YOU WANT

March 24 | 11:30 AM to 1:30 PM | St. Joseph

Participants will learn how the master plan and zoning ordinance inform the development review process, how a community can balance the needs of all actors in the development review process, and best practices for a productive development review process. Course includes a guidebook.

## PARKING BEST PRACTICES

March 24 | 5:30 PM to 8 PM | St. Joseph

Parking is a vexing problem. Large parking lots are expensive to build, and often sit empty or are an eye sore. Yet no one likes driving around looking for a parking space. This 2-hour workshop will equip communities with the information and tools they need to address their unique parking challenges. Course includes a guidebook.

## ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

March 31 | 12:30 PM to 3:30 PM | Ann Arbor

This interactive, case study based workshop goes into depth on the issues of practical difficulty and unnecessary hardship. A summary of voting and membership requirements and other procedural requirements unique to ZBA operations are reviewed. Course includes a guidebook.

## ADVANCED ZBA: BEYOND THE FUNDAMENTALS

March 31 | 5:30 PM to 8:30 PM | Ann Arbor

A high level, interactive session for ZBA members, where recent court cases and statutes are reviewed and where participants will dig into four different case studies and discuss their findings. Basic ZBA knowledge is necessary to best participate. Course includes a guidebook.

# REGISTRATION FORM

Complete one form per registrant.

## CONTACT INFORMATION:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

AFFILIATION \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL (confirmations and directions will be sent via email) \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE (with area code) \_\_\_\_\_

BILLING ADDRESS (include apt. or suite #) \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

I'm a MAP Member

Join MAP now for \$75 and receive the member discount. As a bonus, you will receive membership through June 2027.

MEMBER RATES	NON-MEMBER RATES	*\$25 late fee if you register LESS THAN 5 business days before workshop*
<input type="checkbox"/> \$135 <input type="checkbox"/> \$95	<input type="checkbox"/> \$165 <input type="checkbox"/> \$125	Planning and Zoning Essentials Mar. 18   Frankenmuth Mar. 25 & 26   Virtual
Complimentary, registration required		Making Renewables Add Up Mar. 5   Virtual
<input type="checkbox"/> \$15	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	Building Your Community's Leadership Pipeline Mar. 11   Virtual
<input type="checkbox"/> \$135	<input type="checkbox"/> \$165	Capital Improvements Planning Mar. 18   Frankenmuth
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<input type="checkbox"/> \$135	<input type="checkbox"/> \$165	Parking Best Practice Mar. 24   St. Joseph
<input type="checkbox"/> \$135	<input type="checkbox"/> \$165	Zoning Board of Appeals Mar. 31   Ann Arbor
<input type="checkbox"/> \$135	<input type="checkbox"/> \$165	Advanced ZBA Mar. 31   Ann Arbor
<input type="checkbox"/> \$30 in person <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 virtual		Student Member Rate Workshop & Date: _____

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Send this form to: [info@planningmi.org](mailto:info@planningmi.org)

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Questions? Call us at: (734) 913-2000

# Q&A

## What to Know about Michigan's Renewable Energy and Storage Facility Siting

Imagine you are a planning commissioner in a rural township who has been approached by a developer seeking approval to build a utility-scale solar or wind facility in your community. Or, you are a supervisor of a suburban township, contacted by a developer applying to build a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facility – they tell you that if they don't get a decision by a certain date, they may pursue state siting approval.

These are among the scenarios already unfolding across the state as Michigan pursues one of the boldest renewable energy transition plans in the country. A major impact in this transition is Public Act 233 of 2023 (PA 233), which gives the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) new authority related to the siting of renewables and energy storage. With forecasts for 2026 projecting record-breaking requests for siting approval of renewable projects in the state, it is worth taking a moment to evaluate where things stand, and what you should know to help communities be better prepared and informed.

### *What is the New State Siting Authority?*

As the state's energy regulatory agency, the MPSC has a stated mission to protect the public by providing safe, reliable, and affordable energy and telecommunications services. It is composed of three gubernatorial appointees who serve staggered six-year terms. The MPSC has long had a role in siting of large-scale energy infrastructure, such as high-voltage transmission lines and intrastate natural gas pipelines. Under PA 233, it now also has the ability to review solar and BESS facilities with a capacity of 50 megawatts (MW) or more, and wind facilities with a capacity of 100 MW or more in certain circumstances.



The MPSC Team

Importantly, with limited exceptions, PA 233 continues to require that siting start with the relevant local government.

Whether a project remains local or goes to the state depends on the contents of the local government's ordinance. PA 233 establishes the concept of a "Compatible Renewable Energy Ordinance", or CREO. A local unit is not required to have a CREO; however, having a CREO on the books requires a developer to apply for local approval.

Following passage of the law, the MPSC staff spent much of 2024 engaging with industry experts, local governments, and other interested parties. Based on this work, the MPSC adopted Application Filing Instructions and Procedures, which provide comprehensive instructions geared toward developers to meet the requirements of PA 233, including instructions for engaging with Affected Local Units of government (ALUs).

### *What could local governments be considering while planning for utility-scale renewable energy & energy storage projects?*

Local governments should consider two avenues for utility-scale projects to be reviewed:

1. Local approval: Review project under local ordinance. Make decision within 120 days (extensions allowable by mutual agreement). A local government may review the project either under an ordinance that is consistent with and not more restrictive than the standards in PA 233 (often referred to as a Compatible Renewable Energy Ordinance, or CREO) or through mutually agreed-upon terms between a developer and the local government. Notably, in cases in which a proposed project obtains local approval under the timelines set forth in PA 233, the state has no role.

MPSC Team at a solar installation



2. State review: If a project is denied at the local level, or if the local government exceeds the time allowed for review under PA 233, a developer may seek review through the MPSC contested case process. MPSC decision made within one year based on the requirements of PA 233.

Even if attempts at local permitting through a mutually agreeable ordinance are unsuccessful, the MPSC process involves ample opportunities for ALUs to be engaged and offers impactful commitments to public benefits. For example, ALUs are granted the ability to intervene by right in the MPSC contested case. That allows them access to all shared information between the developer and interested parties, including MPSC staff, and they may formally publish their positions and preferences – even on issues outside the scope allowable under a CREO – by way of testimony and subsequent steps through a contested case. To facilitate this input, ALUs are granted up to \$75,000 per government (capped at \$150,000 total for all ALUs which intervene in a case), paid by the developer, to cover costs for involvement in the case.

In addition, via the MPSC process, ALUs are also entitled to a minimum of \$2,000 per MW within their jurisdiction. A host community agreement or community

benefits agreement, between the developer and community counterparties, sets the terms and public benefits for the project.

#### *How can planners engage with the MPSC process?*

The MPSC's renewable energy and storage siting section staff houses a team of professionals with deep background in subjects covered in PA 233, including infrastructure, environmental compliance, community engagement, permitting, engineering, and planning. The staff serves as independent subject matter experts who provide evaluation and recommendations, along with other intervenors in the case, to help inform the commissioners' determinations.

As renewable energy and storage projects ramp up to meet the state's clean energy goals, it is important to remain aware and up to date on the optional state siting path. Renewable energy projects are long term neighbors with up to 30-year operating lifespans on average. Having awareness and input over the terms and impact of these projects is crucial to community acceptance and will pay dividends through long-lasting and public benefits of the project.

The MPSC's Renewable Energy and Storage Facility Siting webpage includes useful resources that can help aid the

entire process, and the staff is always available to answer questions and may be contacted at LARA—MPSC-Siting@Michigan.gov. The staff are actively seeking opportunities to collaborate with ALUs in each case, aiming to create outcomes informed by local preferences and the community's input.

*The opinions expressed in this article reflect the author's own and do not reflect the Michigan Public Service Commission; the Commission speaks through its orders.*

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#### **Sarah Mullkoff**

*is the Manager of the Renewable Energy and Storage Siting Section at the Michigan Public Service Commission. In this role, she leads the staff team in review of renewable energy and storage applications before the Commission, while facilitating engagement with developers, affected local units of government, and other interested parties.*

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**The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC or Commission)** *is the state's energy regulatory agency. Its mission is to serve the public by ensuring safe, reliable, and accessible energy and telecommunications services at reasonable rates. The Commission is a three-member body of commissioners appointed by the Governor and has a professional staff of approximately 200 individuals.*



# Clean Energy Advances Despite Federal Setbacks

In 2025, the federal government repealed nearly all of the Inflation Reduction Act's (IRA) clean energy provisions through passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA). Before their repeal, the provisions had spurred unprecedented investment in clean energy innovation and made technologies like solar panels and electric vehicles more affordable for all households.

But even before the IRA, consumers were increasingly seeking clean energy solutions to tackle high costs and outages. Renewable energy became the cheapest new generation source in many U.S. power markets in the 2010s. By 2020, the United States had added 23 times as much solar power and triple the amount of wind power as it had in 2011. The EV market grew from a few thousand vehicles in 2010 to more than 300,000 sold per year starting in 2018. Consumers demanded greater energy efficiency, recognizing it as an important savings option. This transition to more affordable, cleaner energy cannot be easily reversed.

In Michigan, state laws and regulatory policies are aligned with these economic trends, ensuring continued investment in clean resources. Michigan's 2023 climate laws require the state's utilities to generate electricity using 100% clean energy by 2040—locking in commitments already made by many utilities. The vision set by these laws has guided further policies to expand renewable energy and use existing clean resources more creatively.

The rapid growth of data centers has created an opportunity for communities and policymakers to invest in energy that is clean, cheap, reliable, and quick to build. The momentum for clean energy may no longer be as accelerated as it was under the IRA, but it progresses, nonetheless.

## Federal Landscape

The challenging federal landscape of 2025 is likely to continue. The OBBBA prematurely sunset tax credits that support home energy efficiency improvements, residential solar, wind, batteries, and EVs. It also added strict foreign entity requirements that complicate tax credit eligibility for products with supply chains that include countries like China.

Beyond the OBBBA, the current administration has rolled back several clean energy policies and programs. In May, the Trump administration ordered a retiring coal plant in west Michigan to stay open to meet peak electricity demand in the summer—an emergency order that has been extended well into the winter. The cost of keeping the coal plant open, which will ultimately be passed on to Michiganders, runs around \$615,000 per day. In August, the EPA canceled Solar for All, which funded solar energy in low-income, rural, and disadvantaged communities. The administration has also targeted energy efficiency programs, with proposals to eliminate Energy Star, the Weatherization Assistance Program, and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Moreover, it has decimated climate and energy offices, leaving a skeleton crew to administer programs like LIHEAP.

But clean energy opportunities at the federal level still exist. Tax credits for geothermal and battery storage remain in effect. The National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure program deploying EV chargers was reinstated in August 2025. And bipartisan lawmakers in Congress are working to speed up utility-scale energy projects through permitting reform.

## State Landscape

As households and businesses increasingly turn toward clean energy, state leaders are working to ensure that laws and regulations keep up with these technologies.

Michigan's 2023 climate laws mandate 100% clean electricity by 2040. To reach that goal, the laws enable more renewable energy buildout in utilities' long-term planning, increase energy efficiency standards, improve low-income energy waste reduction programs, streamline the permitting process, and more.

The state has committed millions of dollars to meet climate goals, including funding for EV charging infrastructure at multi-family residential developments, pre-weatherization for low-income households, and support for Michigan's nonprofit green bank, Michigan Saves.

Michigan's largest utilities, Consumers Energy and DTE Energy, are also maintaining investments in clean energy. According to regulators, the two utilities are on track to reach 50% renewable electricity by 2030, with more than 8,300 megawatts of renewable energy online by the end of 2025. Both utilities will have an opportunity to lay out 15-year energy generation goals in this year's Integrated Resource Plans. With new interstate transmission lines breaking ground soon, the upgraded grid will be able to carry more renewable energy from distributed resources.

In addition, neither major utility has altered its EV adoption forecasts despite the end of federal EV tax credits. As a result, the utilities are keeping their EV programs going, allowing customers to receive rebates for EV charging that will ultimately pass along savings to all ratepayers.

[continued on page 18](#)



# TRANSPORTATION BONANZA

## Thank you Partners



## Thank you Sponsors!



## Your Desk. Our Experts. Smart Planning.

*Join us for more online training:*

### Building Your Community's Leadership Pipeline

March 11 | 3 PM to 4:30 PM

Registration: \$15

### Planning and Zoning Essentials

March 25 & 26 | 6 PM to 8 PM

MAP Members: \$95

### How to Streamline the Development Review Process

April 14 | 3 PM to 4:30 PM

MAP Members: \$35

### Ethics: Fun, Facts, and Credits

June 2 | 12 PM to 1:30 PM

MAP Members: \$35

# Introducing *Strategies for Renewable Energy Revenue: A Guide for Michigan Local Governments*

**W**hat would you do with a once-in-a-lifetime economic opportunity?

Imagine a major developer approaches your rural township with a utility-scale solar, wind, or energy storage proposal. The numbers are eye-popping; a project of this scale could mean millions in new revenue for local priorities.

However, to fully harness the economic development potential that renewables bring, realizing these benefits takes thoughtful consideration of financial strategies—just as in any planning effort—informed by long-term impact projections, local goals, and legal guidance.

As local governments plan for and host renewables, the University of Michigan's Center for EmPowering Communities developed "**Strategies for Renewable Energy Revenue: A Guide for Michigan Local Governments**". This resource offers practical approaches and tools to help align energy development with your community's long-term goals.

## Understanding the money: How renewable energy generates local revenue

In Michigan, municipal revenue from hosting renewable energy projects typically comes in three main forms: tax-based revenue, one-time payments, or—if the local government is the landowner—lease or easement payments.

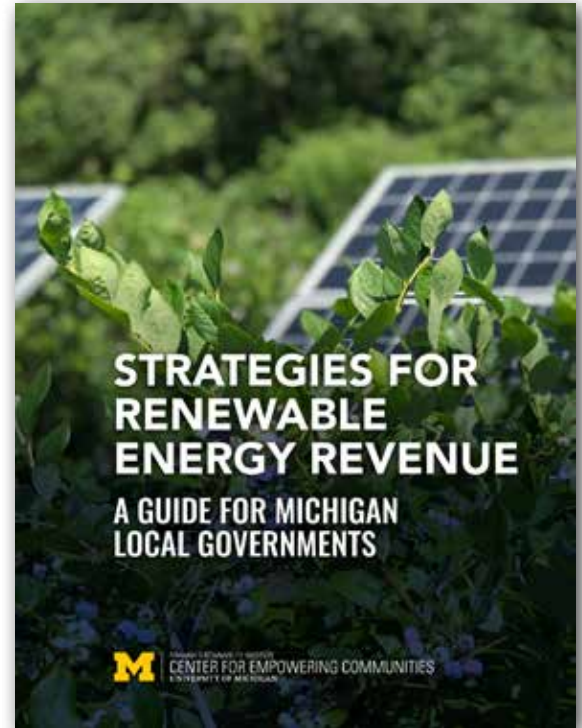
- Tax-based revenue: Like other developments, these projects pay property taxes to local government units, including counties, townships, schools, and more. Because these projects are typically valued at hundreds of millions of dollars, they can often significantly increase the local government's tax base. The majority of equipment in an energy

project is taxed as industrial personal property, though some components fall into utility personal property. The land itself is either taxed as agricultural real property at homestead rates (wind) or industrial real property taxed at higher, non-homestead rates (solar and battery energy storage).

- One-time payments: Communities may receive fixed-rate one-time payments for large renewables projects based on the project's permitting process: the Renewables Ready Communities Award (RRCA) from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) for locally permitted projects, or the state-mandated Host Community Agreement (HCA) payment from developers when projects are approved by the Michigan Public Service Commission under State Siting Legislation (PA 233 of 2023).
- Lease or easement payments: While most renewable energy projects are developed on private land, some local governments own property suitable for large-scale wind, solar, or energy storage development and can negotiate payments directly with the developer.

## Out-of-the-box municipal tax strategies

Local governments have creative options when considering tax revenue from renewable energy projects. Some may wish to lower millage rates, sharing the benefits of an expanded tax base among all taxpayers. Others go in the opposite direction—raising millages or establishing special assessment districts to funnel new revenue into schools, emergency services,



or infrastructure. While higher millage rates may seem unpopular, the bulk of the added tax burden is shouldered by the energy project itself.

In some cases, exempting energy infrastructure from taxation, especially to spur brownfield redevelopment, can be effective. Tax abatements and incentives are powerful tools for revitalizing underused areas, and for brownfield sites, mechanisms like tax increment financing (TIF) can help cover redevelopment costs using the extra value brought by renewables.

## To PILT, or not to PILT?

For solar projects, communities can choose Payment-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILT) instead of the traditional ad valorem personal property tax. The PILT locks in a fixed annual payment per megawatt (\$7,000/MW annually for most projects, \$2,000/MW for those on brownfields, public land, and Opportunity Zones) for 20 years, offering predictable revenue

and minimized risk of property valuation disputes.

However, whether a PILT actually generates more value than regular taxation depends on factors like the project's total cost and, importantly, local millage rates. Typically, jurisdictions with total millage rates lower than 37.57 mills are more likely to find a PILT more lucrative than ad valorem taxation. To better estimate the net tax impact for your community, planners can utilize jurisdiction-specific tax calculators (resources below).

### The peculiarities of one-time payments

While tax revenue and PILT provide regular income to support ongoing municipal operations, one-time payments from the RRCA or HCA are best reserved for targeted, time-limited investments. Since ongoing expenses like maintenance or staffing are more sustainably funded through recurring revenue streams, lump-sum payments are ideal for master plan updates, feasibility studies, equipment purchases, or infrastructure

improvements that are accomplished with a single allocation. To maximize this impact, communities can leverage other existing state and federal grant dollars and take advantage of the flexible nature of RRCA and HCA funds for priorities not otherwise covered.

### Bringing it all together

Capturing value from renewable energy projects requires a tailored approach—balancing regular revenue streams like taxes and PILT with creative strategies and flexible one-time dollars. There's no single "best" strategy; each community must weigh tradeoffs based on its goals, fiscal realities, and legal considerations. Thoughtful use of available strategies, tools and resources, allows planners to deliver lasting benefits for their communities.

The March *Michigan Planner E-dition* newsletter will have links to the guide and additional resources at the Center for EmPowering Communities

**Madeleine Krol (Clean Energy Land Use Specialist) and Olivia Stoetzer (Research Area Specialist)** at the University of Michigan's Center for EmPowering Communities support Michigan local governments with planning and zoning for large-scale renewable energy. As part of the R-STEP team—collaborating with EGLE, MSU-Extension, 5 Lakes Energy and MAP—they offer practical guidance and education through the Renewable Energy Academy to support informed decisions on solar, wind and energy storage.



## Making Renewables Add Up: Financial Considerations for Michigan Communities March 5 | 3 PM - 4:30 PM

This webinar will help local leaders to better understand the financial aspects of renewable energy projects—including solar, wind, and battery storage. Participants will learn to evaluate revenue streams, estimate community benefits, analyze zoning trade-offs, and manage financial obligations throughout project development phases.

**Thanks to an RSTEP grant from EGLE, this webinar is being offered free of charge.**

**Register at [www.planningmi.org](http://www.planningmi.org)**

## Preparing for a Renewable Energy Application Practical Guidance for Planners and Local Officials

**A**cross Michigan, renewable energy is transforming communities and rural landscapes. Planners play an essential role in determining how these technologies square up with local ordinances, community goals, and Michigan's evolving energy generation portfolio. The scale of these projects, technical review requirements, and potential for heightened community concern can pose unique challenges for local review.

### These are Big Projects, Plan Accordingly

It is hard to convey the volume and complexity of the application and site plans for a utility-scale renewable energy system. When I first reviewed a wind energy system over a decade ago, the application (with documentation and site plans) arrived in six or seven banker boxes delivered on a dolly. Times have changed with digital site plans, yet the scale of these applications remains distinct from other land uses.

First, a large-scale project will create months of work and quickly exceed the day-to-day workload. Even the most seasoned local planners will want to strongly consider working with a planning consultant and attorney to assist with all aspects of the project (e.g., site plan review, staff report, permit conditions, and decommissioning). This expertise, paid for by the applicant through escrow, ensures a thorough review and detailed documentation on the record. Even with outside help, staff should anticipate additional workload for project correspondence, detailed minutes, phone calls, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, coordination with



Solar Panels in Calhoun County  
by Madeleine Krol

outside agencies, and meeting coordination.

Second, meetings may require extra care and attention because these projects may generate larger meetings with more public comments. It is unlikely the public hearing alone will provide enough time for the planning commission to fully understand the application. Before a public hearing, consider a series of public meetings for the developer/experts to explain supplemental studies and project design (e.g., birds/bats, sound, stormwater). Anticipate a large audience, maybe the largest ever. To avoid a venue-change delay and the time and expense of a second notification for a public hearing, reserve the community's largest venue for public meetings and the required hearing. It's better to have too much room than too little.

### Common project elements

Although the technologies, footprints, and scales of these projects vary

considerably, broad themes emerge for utility-scale applications.

- Unique environmental concerns: For example, bird and bat populations for wind energy, increased stormwater drainage near solar sites, and fire risk/chemical composition for battery energy storage systems (BESS).
- Audible noise: Sound characteristics vary by technology. It is common to include a sound study with a corresponding mapping analysis as part of the site plan review. Seek out a qualified acoustician (rather than a decibel app) to help the community understand the impacts.
- Decommissioning: Financial guarantees for project removal and land restoration are standard, though communities should also prepare for the possibility that projects may be repowered and continue indefinitely.
- The Master Plan: While zoning standards provide the basis for a

decision, also consider how the application supports or detracts from community goals and objectives.

### Unique considerations

#### Solar

- A 150-200 MW solar project could occupy 750 to 2000 acres – a project of this size can heighten land-use compatibility concerns (e.g., preserving farmland). Solar concerns often overlap with development on farmland, as open, relatively flat land with good drainage is suitable for utility-scale development.
- A solar project is usually on multiple parcels (that are not always contiguous) and can even span multiple municipalities.
- If screening is a local priority, a “workable” ordinance can require vegetative screening outside of the fence perimeter.
- Consider the permanency and/or reversibility of solar, which could potentially impact ground cover decisions (e.g., pollinator habitat for soil health), screening, and stormwater management.

#### Wind

- Concerns arise from the sheer height of the turbines and blade movement (shadow flicker, ice) rather than the project’s footprint.
- Noise studies are inherent to wind energy applications, as turbines produce audible, rhythmic sound. Be prepared to learn more about sound than you ever thought possible.
- The established delivery route for these exceptionally long turbine parts is unique to the technology. A cooperative relationship with the County Road Commission can help leverage proactive communication and maintenance agreements.

#### Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)

- Often located on a single parcel, BESS introduce distinct safety concerns related to chemical composition and

fire risk. Local emergency response and compliance with industry standards and codes (NFP 855) will be part of the application review. Anticipate close collaboration with local first responders.

- Increasingly, BESS are emerging as co-located technology with solar or wind projects, also known as hybrid projects. The U-M *Battery Energy Storage Systems Guide* recommends considering energy storage and generation projects as distinct land uses in proximity, triggering separate applications and review standards.

#### Finally...

However large or high-profile the application is, it’s worth emphasizing the process remains grounded in fundamentals: zoning aligned with the plan, a transparent process free of conflict of interest, and decisions on the record based on standards and findings of fact.

The March *Michigan Planner E-dition* newsletter will have links to additional online resources.

**Mary Reilly, AICP**, is an MSU Extension Educator providing planning, zoning, and governance training in the northern lower peninsula and statewide. Mary and MSU Extension colleagues are part of the R-STEP team working alongside U-M, EGLE, MAP, and Five Lakes Energy to provide renewable energy education and training.



## MAP’s Sustaining and Contributing Members

*Thank You!!*

Richard Carlisle, FAICP  
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Andrew Schmidt, AICP  
David Scurto, AICP  
Norm Tyler, FAICP  
Mark Wyckoff, FAICP

**You can become a sustaining or contributing member today!**  
Contact MAP at 734.913.2000 or [info@planningmi.org](mailto:info@planningmi.org)

# MAP Board: Advancing Coordination, Capacity, and Community

Your MAP Board of Directors met for their annual retreat in Kalamazoo over two days on January 25 and 26, 2026. The purpose of the board retreat is to provide MAP elected leaders with uninterrupted time dedicated to discussing the most pressing issues facing our industry and the state, and to develop a workplan for the upcoming calendar year.

Over two days they did just that. Since 2024 the board has built on a foundational focus of centering planning at all levels of government - State, Regional, County, and Municipal - to create a framework for cooperation, coordination and accountability (See Michigan Planner – March/April 2025 for more information about the framework). Through board activities, linkage meetings, and conference sessions, it has become increasingly clear to MAP leadership that better outcomes at all levels of government are improved if planning is the connective tissue through which policies and programs flow.

As reported at the 2024 and 2025 annual MAP conferences, the board focused its initial learning efforts on establishing the baseline population and economic information needed to develop the framework that would emerge over the following years. They engaged with demographic experts and economic forecasters, the regions, and state agency professionals. They reached out of state too and learned about Tennessee and Georgia mega site experiences, and with planners from several statewide planning offices (Colorado, New Jersey and Oregon) to inform the creation ultimately of a Framework for Michigan's Future that emerged in 2025. At the board's second listening session at the 2025 *Planning Michigan* Conference, more than 75 MAP members considered who else should be



included in talks to better craft statewide planning goals and what strategies might be used for outreach. The results of these efforts were analyzed and integrated into the 2026 Board Work Plan.

The board begins 2026 with a firm plan of action in place. The overarching goals are to engage an ever-increasing list of stakeholders who surely recognize as we do that better coordination and cooperation is needed. How and where the state invests limited resources must be explored comprehensively, and be based in data. Increased capacity for smaller municipalities, especially to maintain or enhance place and prosperity, is vital. Preserving farmland, critical environmental features, and natural resources must be balanced with economic development. Creating systems, or strengthening existing protocols, that are based on planning will be necessary to create a sustainable and prosperous future for all.

The board appreciates the parallel

research and presentations on the history of planning in Michigan developed by Mark Wyckoff, FAICP, most recently presented in a two part webinar, *The Past and Future of Planning*, in January 2026. The webinar was and remains available on MAP's webpage. It is helpful to know where we've been as a profession so that we can build on what worked and avoid pitfalls going forward.

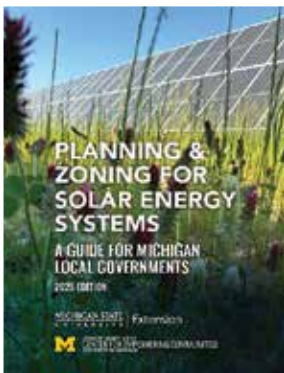
As the board continues to absorb new information in the quest to solidify a framework for Michigan's future rooted in planning principles, we will be also seeking input from our diverse membership. A webinar is planned in August for the board to provide an update. The board will host another input session at the *Planning Michigan* Conference at the Kalamazoo Radisson September 30 to October 2, 2026. As the MAP Board charts the course for the next year, member participation and input will be instrumental in moving MAP forward for the benefit of our local communities and State.

# Free Guides for Michigan Communities on Renewable Energy Development

The Renewable Energy Academy is a one-stop-shop for large-scale renewable energy in Michigan, hosting a hub for resources, tools, and experts in the field and providing no-cost technical assistance to communities.

Through funding from the U.S. Department of Energy's Reliable Energy Siting through Technical Engagement and Planning (R-STEP) program, the State of Michigan's Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy's (EGLE) Energy Services Unit is partnering with the University of Michigan's Graham Sustainability Institute, Michigan State University Extension, 5 Lakes Energy, the Michigan Association of Planning, and more to generate new materials and services to further empower the decision-making capacity of any interested party on the topic of large-scale renewable energy.

Michigan communities navigating the transition to renewable energy now have access to three comprehensive, downloadable guides addressing critical aspects of solar and battery storage development. These resources provide practical frameworks for local planning, zoning, and economic considerations.



***Planning and Zoning for Solar Energy Systems: A Guide for Michigan Local Governments*** was developed to help communities across Michigan understand the siting of solar energy systems relative to local planning policies, zoning regulations, and state law. Originally released in 2021, the guide has been revised to incorporate new state legislation, including PA 233 of 2023, and evolving best practices in solar development.

***Planning and Zoning for Battery Energy Storage Systems: A Guide for Michigan Local Governments*** was developed to aid local governments in navigating the increased deployment of energy storage across the state. This guide provides sample language to incorporate BESS of all scales into a municipality's zoning ordinances. It also addresses zoning options for large-scale BESS, informed by Michigan's new energy siting law, Public Act 233 of 2023.



***Strategies for Renewable Energy Revenue: A Guide for Michigan Local Governments*** was developed to help local governments plan for and manage the economic impacts of large-scale renewable energy projects. The guide outlines three primary revenue streams available to Michigan communities—tax-based revenue, one-time payments, and lease or easement payments—and offers practical strategies and tools to support informed decision-making.



continued from page 10

State lawmakers likewise remain committed to clean energy. In 2025, legislators introduced bills to better utilize resources like solar panels and batteries that already exist in communities. Passage of these bills would save families money on electric bills and lower the risk of power outages without building expensive new power plants. Bipartisan lawmakers also introduced legislation to commit a greater percentage of federal LIHEAP dollars Michigan receives to help low-income families weatherize their homes.

Of course, none of this is to say that clean energy adoption is frictionless in Michigan. Michigan continues to have some of the highest energy bills in the Midwest and one of the worst outage records in the country. EV fees increased in 2026 as a result of last year's state budget and road funding policies. Data center energy demand remains an open question. If done right, these projects could bring more renewables and lower bills. But if they are approved without guardrails, they could bring more costs and uncertainty to Michiganders. Energy policy discussions will likely become more prominent as the 2026 election approaches.

The trend toward affordable, clean energy is inevitable. With households and businesses seeking affordable, efficient, and resilient energy, the tide of clean solutions is unlikely to reverse. The question is whether federal and state policies will ease that transition or be an obstacle.

The March *Michigan Planner E-dition* Newsletter will have links to many articles related to this topic.

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**Dr. Laura Sherman** is the President of the Michigan Energy Innovation Business Council and the Institute for Energy Innovation. In addition to overseeing the operation of the organizations, Laura supports Michigan EIBC's policy platform by leading on regulatory work at the Michigan Public Service Commission. She also serves on the Board of the Zero Emission Transportation Association Education Fund and previously served on the Board of Advancing Women in Energy.



*MAP is sad to share that*  
**Charles "Chuck" Leman,**  
*founding member of*  
*Vilican, Leman & Associates,*  
*passed away on October 6, 2025*  
*at the age of 101.*



**D**rafted in 1943, Chuck served in the U.S. Army's 75th Division, 289th Regiment. He fought in the Battle of the Bulge, was wounded, and taken prisoner on Christmas Day 1944. He endured months in German prison camps before liberation in April 1945. Upon returning home, Chuck earned a degree in landscape architecture from Iowa State University. He worked in Nashville and New York before settling in Detroit. With George Vilican, Chuck founded the planning and design firm, Vilican, Leman & Associates. The firm was known for designing Detroit's riverfront revitalization in the mid-20th century, but also did planning work throughout Michigan, including Alpena, Ecorse, Novi, Tecumseh, Troy, and West Bloomfield, to name a few. Chuck was a member of the Michigan Association of Planning since 1959.



## MAP Board of Directors 2026 Election Nomination's Announcement

The MAP Nominating Committee, chaired by Past President Shari Williams, and including board members Kristen Gundersen and Pablo Majano, is pleased to announce the upcoming 2026 MAP Board Election. This election cycle there are four open seats, including two incumbents running for a second term.

MAP conducts its election in accordance with the election schedule of American Planning Association (APA), who runs our election, and the official call for nominations will be issued when we receive the 2026 election calendar from APA. Election is by electronic ballot.

The call for nominations is typically in March, with a submission deadline in April, and voting in July/August. *Details coming soon!*

# CALLING CARDS

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Renewable Energy  
**March 5**  
*Virtual*

Building Your  
Community's  
Leadership Pipeline  
**March 11**  
*Virtual*

Planning and Zoning  
Essentials  
**March 18**  
*Frankenmuth*

Capital Improvement  
Planning  
**March 18**  
*Frankenmuth*

Getting the  
Development You  
Want  
**March 24**  
*St. Joseph*

Parking Best Practice  
**March 24**  
*St. Joseph*

Planning and Zoning  
Essentials  
**March 25 and 26**  
*Virtual*

Zoning Board of  
Appeals  
**March 31**  
*Ann Arbor*

Advanced ZBA  
**March 31**  
*Ann Arbor*

How to Streamline the  
Development Review  
Process  
**April 14**  
*Virtual*

National APA  
Conference  
**April 25-28**  
*Detroit*

This magazine is available in accessible formats upon request.  
Contact MAP at [info@planningmi.org](mailto:info@planningmi.org) or 734.913.2000.

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