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COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP MODELS: A CASE FOR INCREASED CAPACITY AND EFFICIENCY

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Collaborative Partnership Models

A Case for Increased Capacity & Efficiency

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Introduction

This paper examines an ongoing vexing problem in Northwest Lower Michigan's township government structure and a proposed solution. For the first time since the 1960's and 1970's, much of the 10-county Northwest planning region (Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, Wexford) is experiencing rampant growth. As a result, there are myriad planning themes that the largely rural area has not had to contend with in decades due to increased demands on factors such as land use, housing, transportation, permitting and conservation. Municipal leaders have had to face land use planning challenges most often experienced in places like Grand Rapids or Ann Arbor, established centers of commerce and population. This paper begins by examining the trends in the planning profession that call for greater technical professionalism in the region and the current governmental structures that are making it difficult for this professionalism to exist widely in Northwest Michigan. The authors then summarize an anecdotal survey of three different collaborative planning models at the county level to provide various solutions to this problem, with all three consisting of the same proposed structure: a collaborative planning model.

As Michigan's rural areas continue to see population growth and its subsequent development pressures, now seems to be the time to ensure that planning in the region is professional, collaborative, cost efficient and leading to a quality built environment. Therefore, this paper should be understood as a case study in rural land use planning; its challenges during a period of growth; the various collaborative models that can help meet these challenges; and the costs and benefits of each of these land use planning models according to current planning staff, elected and appointed officials and developers. The models reviewed in this case study include a single-ordinance County Zoning Model, a Joint Planning Commission Model and a County Contractual Model.

Potential Biases to Consider

The authors find it pertinent to identify potential biases in their analytical descriptions found within this paper. To begin, both authors are certified planning professionals. Therefore, they tend to argue for the planning profession and its merits in quality community development. Both authors are affiliated with their region's Council of Governments and while their assessment of each collaborative planning model strives to be as evidence-based as possible, there are obvious reasons why the regional collaborative partnership model would be their preferred option. However, this is not always the case. Discussed later, there is no option that is best suited for all counties and their local units of government. For example, there are instances where the authors would recommend a county model instead of a regional partnership. In summary, to the best of the authors' abilities, this assessment is as impartial as possible.

The Contemporary Planning Profession

To begin, the challenge for small towns in the Midwest, and especially those along the east edge of Lake Michigan, is the evolution of the planning profession itself. This evolution has been centered around three main contributing factors within the profession: technology, the growth of federal funding, and the weighted importance of democratic processes. Each of these factors highlights the difficulty that rural townships often experience and the reason why this paper focuses on collaborative partnership models as a potential solution.

Technology

Technology has greatly improved the planning profession's ability to respond to the many challenges that give planning its merit. The world is constantly evolving; therefore, it is necessary for our communities to have the data and practices necessary to change in coordination. For example, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) have made it possible for planners to make complex land use, demographic and environmental analyses. Decisions in transportation infrastructure, for instance, are more efficient as traffic counts and road condition data can be cataloged and reviewed in maps and datasets. Census Bureau

data can be integrated into spatial software to more easily identify vulnerable populations so that public services can be organized to help people gain access to them.

In addition to spatial mapping, design software has revolutionized public input processes during the planning phase of implementation. Rather than asking what members of the public want to see occur with zoning or development style, planning teams can now show them with before-and-after renderings and 3D models using software such as Photoshop and SketchUp. These software programs provide individuals without the technical background in planning and zoning ability to participate in planning with greater capacity to vocalize their preferences.

Social media and the low cost of websites have made it possible to communicate with large swaths of the public to garner their sentiments on any given topic. A QR code that links to a survey can be shared with thousands of people at a low cost, due to there being no need for printing or postage. Members of the public can participate in planning from their homes rather than relying upon transportation means to gain access to a public input session.

As technology has made it possible to be more efficient, communicative and creative, it has also meant that more is expected of planning professionals. Often, the planner must exhibit some talent in many realms of the discipline, especially as it pertains to the growing use of technology in the field. For these reasons, the planning profession has become more specialized. Planners almost always require an undergraduate degree if not a master's degree to be competitive for most hiring positions. This speaks well of the skillset required but presents a problem for communities that have difficulty attracting such positions because of a smaller staffing capacity. In many cases, to be compliant with state planning and zoning enabling legislation, the locality must foot the bill for a professional planner. Discussed later, this is exacerbated when residential and commercial development proposals exceed the necessary staffing capacity in the community. Technology and its place in local decision making have contributed to the demand for professional planning in rural areas.

Growth of Federal Funding to Local Governments

Local municipalities, especially those of a rural character, are now heavily reliant on federal and state funding to implement built environment projects. Table 1 displays federal aid to local governments, in billions of dollars, categorized by Transportation, Community and regional development and General government. Since 1960, funding for Community and regional development has expanded from \$0.1 billion to \$43.2 billion in 2022 (Office of Management and Budget). From 2000 to 2022, transportation funding from federal to state and local governments increased from \$32.2 billion to \$93.9 billion. These are just a couple of examples highlighting the growing dependence on federal dollars to support local initiatives.

Table 1. Federal Funding to State and Local Governments in the United States, FY2024 (Outlays in billions of dollars)

	Actual										Estimate	
	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2022	2023	2024
Transportation	3.0	4.6	13.0	19.2	32.2	43.4	61.0	60.8	69.3	93.9	92.2	101.0
Community and regional development	0.1	1.8	6.5	5.0	8.7	20.2	18.9	14.4	52.5	43.2	57.8	58.6
General government	0.2	0.5	8.6	2.3	2.1	4.4	5.2	3.8	4.3	112.3	11.8	11.1

Source: Office of Management and Budget

As a result of this trend, local governments must allocate time and therefore resources to apply for grant funding and to manage awarded grants. This work can often require a higher degree of professionalism and technical expertise than many rural governments possess internally. Therefore, similar to gaps in technological expertise, local governments have to make the decision to expend resources to hire grant coordinators or these tasks need to be housed at the county level or through private

consultants. As local governments depend more on federal dollars to support efforts for capacity to facilitate processes which generate the built environment, their reliance on technical assistance grows.

Weighted Importance of Democratic Processes

Robust public input processes have become the standard for most modern community development. Those tasked with implementation have come to see both the practicality and ethical reasoning for engaging a range of stakeholders and members of the public. From a practical standpoint, stakeholder engagement throughout a development planning process helps to avoid what the National Charrette Institute (NCI), housed at Michigan State University (MSU), terms ‘double work’ (National Charrette Institute, 2014). This term refers to instances in which planning processes are stymied at their implementation stages because a critical stakeholder voice was not considered at the onset of the process. One such example may include a housing development in a residential neighborhood. The developer may have the support of the local unit of government, the zoning may allow for it and the funding could be available. However, if the developer fails to engage, for instance, a small but vocal and well-connected neighborhood organization, the project could be derailed at the last minute. Therefore, professional planners now consider the NCI model a best practice, wherein all stakeholders are identified and engaged throughout the process.

The ethical benefit of wide-ranging engagement is fairly straightforward: projects that consider diverse viewpoints more often represent a diverse multitude of stakeholders. This concept is codified in the American Institute of Certified Planners Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct in Section A.2.b where it states, “Participation should be broad enough to include those who lack formal organization or influence, especially underrepresented communities and marginalized people” (American Planning Association). Sherry Arnstein’s “A Ladder of Public Participation”, perhaps best encapsulates the shift in mindset that occurred in the planning profession during the 1960’s (Arnstein, 2016). Arnstein’s famous essay defines “citizen participation” by breaking it into eight definitions categorized into nonparticipation, tokenism and citizen power. She states that much of what is called citizen participation is little more than

a form of therapy, or at worst, manipulation. Arnstein advocates for shared citizen power in decision-making processes as a way to ensure that private developments that are paid for with private funding are still in the community's best interest. This line of thinking is now considered a necessary best practice in most cases and therefore, planners must have the skillset to effectively engage stakeholders.

Because of the well-known practical and ethical benefits of citizen-guided decision making, planning processes are now often required by granting agencies. For example, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources requires that park and recreation plans include a public engagement chapter to be eligible for project grant funding (Michigan Department of Natural Resources, 2021). Also, the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (Act 110 of 2006) states that zoning must be based on a master plan, which must include a public input chapter and public hearing. Due to the growing need for quality public engagement processes, local governments have, again, come to rely more on professional planners for access to funding and to be in accordance with ethical best practices.

Michigan as a Useful Case Study

While Northwest Lower Michigan is the focus of this study, the demographic makeup and recent growth patterns can be aptly applied to many other rural and suburban localities throughout the state. In other words, the three factors described in this section could be considered societal considerations that call for collaborative partnership models. These three societal factors exist in addition to the aforementioned planning profession factors that are creating strains on small rural townships in Northwest Michigan. These factors include Michigan's township government structure, aging populations and declining civic participation.

First, Michigan is somewhat unique in the sheer number of municipalities it holds. According to the Michigan Townships Association website, "The state of Michigan has 1,240 townships, which vary considerably in geographical size and population. Based on 2020 U.S. Census figures, township populations in Michigan vary from 15 to nearly 100,500 people" (Michigan Townships Association). While this local control does well to help communities plan for and fund their preferred development and

infrastructure features, it can also discourage collaboration and cost-sharing, thereby creating redundancies in services. It is important to note that developers, homeowners, recreationists, tourists and natural features often do not notice political boundaries. Therefore, the many township zoning ordinances and jurisdictional differences created by township government can be a hindrance to community advancement rather than contributing.

Additionally, there are not enough planning, legal, development and other professionals for each municipality to have its own in-house team to oversee growth pressures. Noted throughout this study, this has important implications and is a growing realization that many local municipal leaders are reaching. At a minimum, many municipalities are beginning to share services such as fire and zoning administration with their neighbors. However, land use planning and permitting is increasingly necessary to share across jurisdictional boundaries, not least of which for legal reasons.

Northern Michigan's growing development demands can prove to be legally challenging for many local governments and their staff. Issues arise when the community or local officials have one perspective on preferred development aesthetics, and developers, or private residents have another. This emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive, easily understood zoning ordinance and its connection to the master plan. If any of these documents have contradictions, ambiguities or do not reflect the actual desires of the community, they can be challenged by outside legal teams. Peninsula Township in Grand Traverse County is perhaps the best example of this challenge. This township encompasses Old Mission Peninsula, a picturesque area with views of the Grand Traverse Bays, miles of orchards and vineyards and an influx of demand pressures from buyers from around the state and country. These outside individuals and businesses, in relation to the high cost of real estate on the peninsula, often have the financial means to legally challenge the Township's zoning provisions; the associated legal fees and staff time needed to deal with these issues can be quite costly, hindering the ability to work on municipal projects that would otherwise benefit local residents.

Peninsula Township is not the exception to this occurrence, as any municipality receiving demand from development can see the same in their community. For example, there are many Northwest Michigan communities that may reasonably see similar development pressures in the near future that do not have regular office hours. This can make permitting extremely difficult and can lead to potential development leaving the community for a municipality with clearer processes. Therefore, local jurisdictions are better suited to ensure development occurs in the manner preferred by community members when they are staffed by professional planners with a robust knowledge of land use law and zoning.

Aging Population & Declining Civic Participation

Michigan has an aging population that, when considered in addition to declining civic participation amongst younger generations, will likely make it difficult for rural townships to recruit elected and appointed officials in local government. A 2019 article in Bridge Magazine notes that “U.S. Census data released [June, 2019] show that 21 of Michigan’s 83 counties have a median age of 50 years old or older, the highest in the nation” (Wilkinson, 2019). The article goes on to note that only nine of the state’s counties have a median age less than the national average, which can be primarily attributed to those counties having university centers. The aging population is vitally important for local governance. Local units rely on volunteer-based appointed officials for planning commissions (PC), zoning boards of appeal, recreation commissions and many others. With so many units of local government, therein lies a need for many volunteers. As many of Northwest Michigan’s planning commissioners and even elected officials age out of their positions, it is not clear whether many of these localities will be able to replace them during a time when civic participation is declining.

Political, civic and religious participation have all decreased in U.S. society since the 1960’s. Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* (2000), is perhaps the most well-known book that cites the ongoing decline of various markers of civic participation. To include one example, he notes that the number of Parent Teach Association (PTA) members per 100 million families with kids 18 and under dropped from

47 in 1960 to 19 in the later 1990's. Putnam attributes these political, social, and religious participation declines to four key factors: pressures of time and money, suburbanization and long commute times, electronic entertainment and generational change (Putnam, 2000). As a result of this trend, Michigan's communities will likely find it more difficult to replace unelected positions such as planning commissioners, recreation commissioners and volunteer groups as the current cohort ages out of these roles. This also highlights the potential need to consolidate land use planning in a collaborative manner.

Proposed Solution: Collaborative Models

The rising technicality of the planning profession coupled with societal factors have left many of Michigan's rural townships and villages unable to meet the contemporary expectations of developers and members of the public. As development pressures from rising population continue on their steady course, something has to give if Northwest Michigan's built environment is to be of high quality and in accordance with demographic needs. This paper makes the hypothesis that collaborative partnership models at the county level are one solution to this vexing problem. Therefore, the next logical question is what does a collaborative county model look like?

In the Northwest Michigan region, there are currently three different but similar models in place. The models represent efforts within each of the studied communities to facilitate a planning and zoning process that meets the needs of the participating local units of government, while also creating economies of scale through efficiencies for the development approval process. The three models from Wexford County, Emmet County and Manistee County are outlined below.

Wexford County

The Wexford County model is considered a 'Joint Municipal Planning Commission (JPC)' model. The model is characterized by a single planning commission which is composed of one representative from each of the participating local units of government (townships). The authority for the model is set legislatively through the Joint Municipal Planning Act (Act 226 of 2003), which has been amended to include reference to both the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2008) and the

Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (Act 110 of 2006). The provisions of the Joint Municipal Planning Act allow for the legislative bodies of two or more municipalities to each adopt an ordinance that creates an agreement establishing a JPC to oversee a jurisdictional area of the participating jurisdictions, which may include all or part of the combined territory of those participating. At the time of this writing, 10 of the 16 townships in Wexford participate in the JPC. The JPC oversees the administration of a single zoning ordinance for the geographic area of all participating entities. The remaining townships, the City of Cadillac, the City of Manton and the two villages currently oversee standalone, self-controlled regulatory processes for their respective civil divisions.

In order to administer and meet the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance, two part-time zoning administrators work in tandem to answer questions from developers and members of the public, process permits and provide assistance with navigating the approval process for applicants. The zoning administrators work in conjunction with the ten-member Joint Planning Commission. Joint Planning Commission membership is outlined within the Planning Commission Ordinance which provides that each participating municipality shall appoint a representative to serve on the commission and that member may be a member of the entity's legislative body. Other qualifications include:

1. All members must reside within the municipality which they represent;
2. Priority for each member to represent what is best for the entire planning jurisdiction (i.e. collaboration beyond township boundaries);
3. A secondary priority for each member to represent his or her respective municipality;
4. A third priority for each member to represent important community interests (e.g. environment, agriculture, forestry, land use, education, recreation, tourism, industrial, economic, transportation, communication, sanitation, environmental health, housing, and human services interests); and
5. That continuing education for members shall occur as specified in the JPC's by-laws.

The process for permit review and issuance through the Wexford County Joint Planning Commission resides wholly within the authority of the Planning Commission and staff. By-right permits are administratively executed by professional staff while Special Use/Planned Unit Development (PUD) permits are brought before the Planning Commission following the appropriate processes outlined through its statutory authority. Individual township boards/commissioners are not asked to review and provide recommendations on applications and materials.

Emmet County

The Emmet County model may be considered a standard ‘County Zoning’ model. The model is defined by a single set of zoning ordinance regulations that are administered across the local units of government (townships) within Emmet County by the county itself. Authority for the model is set legislatively by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2008) and the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (Act 110 of 2006). At the time of this writing, 12 of the 16 townships units in Emmet County cooperate and collaborate under the umbrella of the County Zoning model. The local units of government that have elected to not participate with the Emmet County Zoning model are characteristically more urbanized and include four townships, two cities and three villages.

To effectively meet the need for administration of the Emmet County Zoning Ordinance, the county has a functional planning department staffed by a team of six professionals. The team includes a planning & zoning director, an assistant planner and zoning director, an assistant planner/ordinance enforcement officer, an administrative assistant/permit processor, an administrative assistant, and a receptionist. The County Planning Department staff work in conjunction with the County Planning Commission which is a nine-member body appointed by the County Board of Commissioners. The Planning Commission member qualifications are:

1. A qualified elector of Emmet County, except one member may be a non-qualified elector;
and
2. Shall not be an officer or employee of the County; and

3. Shall meet the conditions provided for each individual member of the Planning Commission Ordinance.
4. Membership shall consist of up to two members of the Emmet County Board of Commissioners; and
5. A member of a public school board, or administrative employee of a school district; and
6. Diverse geographic area representation; and
7. Diverse interests of the County shall be represented (e.g. agriculture, natural resources, governmental/municipal, economic/business, engineering/architectural, tourism, and social/recreation interests).

The process for permit review and issuance in Emmet County varies based upon the permit type (i.e. By-right vs. Special Use/PUD. In all cases, the local unit of government is included at some stage during the review process so that their input is considered by the county when making a permitting decision. With by-right permits for commercial and residential development, the Township Supervisor and the Fire Chief review the individual application materials and provide any recommendations. For Special Use Permits and Planned Unit Development Permits, the county sends the application materials to the respective township governing body. It then asks the local body to review the application and provide a formal recommendation for approval or denial at a regularly held meeting of that board or commission. The County Planning Commission then holds the appropriate legislatively required hearings for the process and takes into consideration the recommendation provided by the local unit of government.

Manistee County

The Manistee County model is unique from the other two models presented in this study, in that it does not specifically draw from an authority for establishment of a body or process for the oversight of development application submissions. Instead, the county acts as a sort of contractor with the local units. The model is characterized by contractual service agreements with willing local units of government (city, village, and township) for the administration of their own specific zoning ordinance. Unique from

the other models, Manistee County maintains a Planning Commission which works in conjunction with Planning Department Staff, but the Planning Commission body does not participate in development application review or approval processes. Rather, each respective participating contracted local unit of government maintains their own Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals' bodies which work in tandem with the contracted professional staff of the Manistee County Planning Department. In other words, the only relationship the county has with the local units is to act as staffed zoning administrators. The County is currently contracted for the zoning administration duties of three villages and three townships, though multiple townships are currently adapting their zoning ordinances to a uniform model to increase the county's willingness to contract with them in the future for zoning administration.

The Manistee County Planning Department has six staff members including a Planning Director, two Planner I positions, a Soil Erosion Administrator/Assistant to Planner, Clerical Assistant, and a Soil Erosion Officer/Code Enforcement Officer. The ability to contract with additional communities is directly related to the staff capacity of the department, which will be outlined in the analysis.

Each respective community maintains their own Planning Commission with a variable number of membership seats, representation and duties. Qualifications are too numerous to provide for each entity, but commonalities for qualifications include that a planning commissioner:

1. Must be a resident of the community in which they serve; and
2. Must be a diverse group representing varied interests (i.e. recreation, natural resources, education, economic development/business, agriculture, housing, etc.).

The processes for permit review and issuance follow the legislative requirements of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Act) 33 of 2008 and the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (Act 110 of 2006) and are met by each respective local unit of government under contract with Manistee County. This means that the local units maintain their own zoning ordinances, denoting that the various ordinances the county administers are often different from an administrative perspective. Professional staff at the county level

work in conjunction with each respective entity's governing body and planning commission for permit review processes. Permits that are By-Right according to local zoning are handled administratively by County Planning Department staff. Permits that are Special Use/Planned Unit Development follow the stated processes within each respective jurisdiction's ordinances with County Planning Department staff acting as the administrating body.

Methodology

To gain a comprehensive understanding of each of the three models, it was imperative to garner input from a diverse group of stakeholders within each of the communities. Diverse, in this sense, means that the interviewees interact with the zoning process in different ways. The researchers made this choice in order to understand the three development and zoning administration processes from various actors to glean areas where their insights align and where they differ. Therefore, three stakeholder types were identified and interviewed for each of the models. These included an executive staff member at the county level, a county planning commission member and a developer. After various attempts, the researchers could not secure an interview with a developer in Manistee County and elected to interview a Township Supervisor that is currently not contracted with the county for zoning services instead. Additionally, the researchers interviewed a developer with the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, who develops primarily in Manistee County, so that their unique perspective could supplement that model's respondent group. A full list of the interviewees and their biographies can be found as Appendix A.

It is important to note that although there is an even distribution of stakeholders with unique viewpoints and involvement with the process, the study does not cover a large enough number of participants to make the information obtained more statistically representative of a community at-large. Instead, this paper acts as the beginning of what the authors hope is an ongoing and growing analysis of collaborative partnership models.

Questionnaire Creation

The method of research for this paper was phone interviews with the aforementioned stakeholders. Each of the interviewees held significant experience or knowledge with at least one of the community models identified for this report. The interviewer followed the series of questions within Appendix B, attached to this report, while allowing the discussion to be partially guided by the respondents' answers to each question. For example, if a respondent noted that staff within a particular model was a primary reason for the successful implementation of the model, the subsequent questioning sought to expand upon that response to get to the key point of the professional stature of that staff member in terms of experience, credentials or personality. In other words, the questions guided the interview, but the interview was not bound strictly to the questions.

The research team developed the questionnaire under four categories based upon the interviewees: questions outlined for executive staff overseeing the model process; questions outlined for Planning Commission members who participate within the model or oversee staff for the model; questions outlined for Local Unit Officials who may be or may not be involved with the collaborative model; and questions outlined for representatives of the development community who have navigated the model process. The interview questions are organized by category within Appendix B.

Interview Process and Input

The researchers reached out to the targeted interviewees by phone or email to establish a time to conduct the interview. In several cases executive staff guided the researchers to communicate with individuals having expertise and knowledge of the models who were readily available and willing to participate. The interview processes were conducted via virtual meeting space or through a direct phone call. The interviewer provided an introduction into the research being conducted and asked the interviewee their willingness and permission to be a participant. The interviewer then moved into the series of questions specific to the category of the interviewee. The researcher recorded responses in the

discussion as notes during each interview in order to be referenced when compiling the research and performing analysis.

Results

The input received was expansive and provided insight into a few avenues of information not initially considered by the researchers. The researchers categorized the responses for this analysis section into three areas:

1. Findings of full agreement.
2. Findings unique to each type of collaborative model.
3. Primary themes of general consensus.

Findings of Full Agreement

The resulting interviews helped to identify multiple key themes for which all stakeholders agreed on, in regard to collaborative partnership models or the absence of such models in the planning and zoning process. These themes included: availability of office hours, professionalism of staff and the necessary capacity to meet the needs of the community. The following paragraphs describe the narrative of each of these themes.

Office Hours

Each of the participants noted that the availability of office hours five days per week during typical business hours of 8:00am to 5:00pm contributes great benefits to the community from a development, permitting and administrative standpoint. The executive staff described their ability to communicate readily with those seeking information from their respective offices. They stated that they can complete requests without limited timeframes to receive or generate timely and descriptive responses. Planning Commission members, in a position of oversight as well as being actively involved with a local unit of government, expressed their pleasure with being able to directly contact the administrative office and have confidence that the phone call or email will be immediately answered in a timely manner.

Additionally, the Planning Commissioners stated that they are comfortable directing developers and members of the public to contact their respective administrative offices whenever there is a question about a process, location or site, permit or other activity which fall under the umbrella of a model overseen by a respective administrative staff. The stakeholders of the development community noted strong support for office hour availability. Each stated regular office hours as having a direct impact on the efficiency of approval processes and agreed that this availability was extremely beneficial with the dynamic nature of an individual development site process. For some developments, the contractors may need to contact officials overseeing a process, often times on extremely short notice. Regular and consistent office hours were a priority and a benefit to each of the respondent stakeholders.

Similarly, the stakeholder group identified local governments that did not participate within a collaborative model as disadvantageous. They described this trend as most often occurring in rural communities. However, even in more urbanized areas, the developers stated that many departments are now adjusting to a four-day work week, which has drawbacks to the development process, limiting availability of officials for communication.

Professionalism of Staff

As described earlier in this paper, the planning profession itself has become quite technical and therefore calls for a greater level of professionalism from members of the public and developers alike. Stakeholders, in this regard, declared that one asset displayed by each of the collaborative models is the ability to maintain very high-quality professional staff. Professional staff in relation to each of the models was generally defined by the interviewees as knowledgeable, well-trained, efficient and personable. Executive staff focused on the importance of quality department staff for each of the models with reference to administrative, code enforcement, and planners among others. Professional staff members ease communication efforts, reduce the need for constant oversight by leadership, alleviate concerns of poor quality or inaccurate information, and provide a collaborative network within the respective models, thereby allowing for process efficiency.

These sentiments were shared by Planning Commissioners and local officials when discussing both model oversight and its coordination. This included statements on the quality of materials and packets provided to local units for meetings and decision-making processes and the ability to answer questions and provide direction. One respondent stated that the efforts made by quality professional staff, ‘make the job of a planning commission member easy and sometimes effortless’. Members of the development community outlined the importance of knowledgeable staff in guiding application processes and navigating not only community standards, but the personalities of elected and appointed officials. The ability to reach out and reliably trust that the staff within a particular collaborative model will be able to answer questions, provide guidance and identify different avenues of approach for a process leads to efficiency of approvals and cost savings to the developer seeking approval.

Capacity

Within each collaborative model, interviewees stated that capacity has had a vast beneficial impact across their communities. Capacity here is defined as the propensity for the model to efficaciously manage the interactions that occur during processes through staff time commitment, while not impacting other ongoing processes or interactions that would redirect staff attention. The executive staff stated that having the capacity of additional staff within their department contributes greatly to the efficiency of their model and its processes. The ability to handle multiple ongoing processes, where efficiencies are achieved through close-knit working relationships, leads to a well-functioning system for planning and zoning administration. This level of capacity was noted also by the planning commission members during their interviews.

One main data point supporting sound capacity came from comments regarding Manistee County’s contractual zoning service agreements. Both the executive staff and the Planning Commission Chair in Manistee noted that the ability to expand services was entirely based on the issue of capacity. The administration of individual zoning ordinances for each community was largely constrained by staff capacity to oversee each individual unique set of regulations; as opposed to a single collaborative zoning

ordinance (Wexford and Emmet), or at the very least, various zoning ordinances with a similar organization and administrative procedures (Manistee County).

Representatives of the development community identified capacity as being extremely beneficial to process management, especially processes that extended beyond the local units' often lacking professional acumen or office hour availability. The developer interviewees identified some of the components of capacity that define the term and that were more present in the collaborative partnership models: professional staff's ability to provide service during the absence of another staff member; the staffed planning department's ability to divide tasks to have them completed in a relatively short amount of time; and to respond to, and later, answer questions asked by the development community. Ultimately, the development community agreed that a well-rounded staff is an advantage over a township that relies solely on a planning commission with volunteer members, or a lone zoning administrator that, provides few office hours.

Individual Respondent Description of the Model's Effect

Wexford County Executive Staff Member

Wexford's Executive Staff member described that the 10 participating townships in Wexford County made the decision to move towards a collaborative partnership model as a quick response to the removal of county planning services in 2016. After the county dissolved its planning department, the townships were left with a year to find a workable solution. Township leadership collaborated with Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) and their team of land use educators, with the university providing facilitation services to help the townships identify the specifics of the collaborative model. This planning effort led to the development of the Joint Master Plan, Joint Zoning Ordinance as well as providing relevant training for appointed members of the commission and any hired staff.

The advantage of this model, according to the interviewee, is that collaboration is built into the structure of the model itself. Each township has one representative, which creates a wider geographic area for the townships to consider. The drive that keeps each township participating in the model is that each

entity is responsible for bearing all costs associated with a withdrawal from the Joint Planning Commission (JPC). The benefit is that through shared costs, each township has access to professional staff. Therefore, in order to make amendments to the Zoning Ordinance, the townships agree to work in partnership. This coordination and consensus-building is built into the JPC model, by definition.

Wexford County Planning Commission Member

The interviewed planning commission member in Wexford stated very strong support for the collaborative partnership model or the JPC. He placed emphasis on the ability of the JPC to be established and perform the function formerly held by Wexford County through a sound transition. Staff members are regarded in high esteem, in large part because of their professional ability to carry out tasks in a quality and timely manner. The interviewee said that he considers the composition of the model as including only local units of government to be stronger than the former Wexford County Zoning model. According to the respondent, in the previous single-county zoning model, there were often county board members' appointees to the county planning commission who were not supportive of land use planning or permitting. This means that the county was not in accordance with the planning preferences of the townships, leading to the eventual formation of the JPC when the county rescinded services.

Wexford County Developer

Support for the JPC was certain from the development stakeholder. This individual described his experience with development processes within individual local units of government and the frequent difficulties of implementing projects. The respondent emphasized the importance of the Wexford County JPC model in remedying this problem. In working with the JPC, the developer discussed the knowledge of staff and planning commission members in the Wexford JPC model and how this drastically contrasts with what is frequently found at an individual local unit of government, particularly in rural areas. He stated that knowledge and experience lead to clear guidance and an efficient process. In this model, there is less need to pause or delay projects to receive information and findings for approval.

Aside from timeliness, the developer also described how ideal professional staff services are compared to the relationship-building required in some rural townships. From a business perspective, the development community prefers business relationships as opposed to striving to be ‘liked’, and a process that seems to deal with ‘popularity’, which the developer had experienced in rural local units of government.

Emmet County Executive Staff Member

The interviewed executive staff stated strong support for the Emmet County model of a single zoning ordinance administered through a County Planning Commission. The model works very effectively by providing coordination across several agencies (Soil Erosion, Road Commission, and Public Safety), leading to high efficiency during the permit approval process.

The staff member identified one key deficiency within the single zoning ordinance model in Emmet. In the Emmet model, staff must seek recommendations from the individual townships for Special Land Use and Planned Unit Developments. This requirement means that decision-making occurs at the township and the county levels, meaning two different meetings are needed to reach a decision. Therefore, staff must appropriately schedule two meetings, duplicate materials, and anticipate the participation of the applicant at separate meetings.

Emmet County Planning Commission Member

The Emmet County PC member noted support for the Emmet County single-ordinance zoning model. The interviewed PC member witnessed the transition of a township out of the model to perform those functions wholly within and by that local unit of government. The township later sought to rejoin the Emmet County model once they had attempted to administer their ordinance on their own. The benefits of the Emmet County model are numerous and expand beyond the ‘Findings of Full Agreement’ to include greater technology and training for Planning Commission membership at the county level. The PC member also stated that some of the communities outside of the model are deficient due to an often-

lesser understanding of processes and regulations. This can lead to difficulties in navigating a process for a land use applicant.

Emmet County Developer

The development representative also stated strong support of the Emmet County model, particularly the professionalism of the staff within the County Planning Department. According to the respondent, the single set of regulatory ordinances allows for an easier approach to the development process; a site plan can be drawn that meets the requirements and can be more easily sited in any of the local units of government participating in the collaborative partnership model. He also noted that Emmet County also has quality technology use: information is quickly shared with staff, officials, and the developer. The Zoning Ordinance and other relevant ordinances are all accessible on the county government's website. Payments and document submittals can all be made on the website as well. Essentially, the county's use of online portals, professional electronic communication, and access to information help to decrease project costs and timelines.

The developer identified one deficiency in the model. Since the model requires certain permits to be reviewed by the local townships' planning commissions and by the county planning staff, the review and approval process is relatively slower. As described in the previous paragraph, the interviewee also identified this practice of 'double-review' as a simultaneous benefit and an example of collaboration. When asked about the deficiencies of local units not participating in the model, the developer listed concerns that include: a lack of office hours, a lack of professional staff, an inability to understand or communicate a process sufficiently, and insufficient compensation to maintain appropriate staffing. Regarding townships contracting their zoning service to private consultants, the developer stated that private firms have intentionally extended processes to increase billable hours.

Manistee County Executive Staff Member

Executive staff for the Manistee County Planning Department declared support for the land use contract service program that has been established in the county since 2018. The respondent noted that the system has led to increased trust through the collaboration of the various local units of government. In addition, the model has led to increased transparency for local units of government through accurate process implementation of state statutory requirements. Local unit officials have identified the improvements to the respective system of permit issuance in their communities after their experience with the model. Successes borne from the program have led to a desire of currently uncontracted communities to join the Manistee County collaborative partnership model.

The executive staff member noted that the major barrier to the county's contracting and working with additional local units of government is the need for sufficient staff capacity to administer the program. The program is designed to administer each individual community's zoning ordinance according to the process outlined within the community and working in conjunction with the community's appointed commissions and boards. The administration of unique regulatory provisions in each community is reliant upon an average staff capacity ratio of one professional planner per three contracted rural local units of government (townships/villages). The ratio decreases if a more urbanized local unit comes under contract as the greater complexity of the locality's regulations creates a need for more communication. This is in addition to a greater number of permit processes. The executive staff member proposed that the current collaborative partnership model and its efficacy are prompting participating and some non-participating communities to support the development of a single county-wide zoning ordinance.

Manistee County Planning Commission Member

The Manistee County PC member stated that expertise is desired by the local units of government and coveted once it is made available. The PC member also described how local units of government either do not have a need for full-time staffing, or do not have the financial resources to maintain one.

This circumstance has led to many collaborative relationships, with multiple townships renewing their contracts with the county despite increased compensation required for these services. Overall, there have been positive relationships with the contracted local units. However, the City of Manistee, which was under contract from 2018 to 2023, decided not to renew its contract upon its expiration in September 2023. The reasons provided pertained to maintaining full local control with the city. It was expressed that the city requested more duties from county staff than contractually agreed upon. For example, the city often sought assistance with items outside of the scope of the current service contract, which is not typically associated with the administration of a development process. The county has drawn a hard line on only administering contract-specified duties, a detail strongly supported by the County Planning Commission membership and elected Board of Commissioners.

Manistee County (Maple Grove Township) Township Supervisor

The township supervisor serves a community which is not currently under contract with the County Planning Department. The supervisor noted that in Maple Grove Township there is support for a collaborative zoning model, as well as knowledge that the model is succeeding in its intended outcomes. He stated that these observations came as a result of discussions with other neighboring township officials currently partnering in this model. The township has discussed the county's ability to contract with the township. The county has not been willing to take on more contracts, however, due to limited capacity in staffing.

The benefits of the Manistee County model are evident to the community leadership through the deficiencies noted while maintaining their own zoning administration staff. The respondent identified issues such as: lacking a professional staff member knowledgeable in zoning; low communication between staff and other township officials; the expense involved with maintaining a staff member; and the necessary training to establish the skills base to be able to perform the duties. Support from this community for a single ordinance and simplifying the development process county-wide was relayed during the interview.

Manistee County Tribal Economic Developer

The tribal economic development representative stated support for the collaborative partnership model similar to other respondents in this study. Distinctive points arose from the interview and aligned with issues present in many rural local units of government. Outside of the model, elected and appointed leadership at the local level, especially in rural areas, is often characterized by a lack of competition for elected seats. The respondent specifically noted that local legislators will serve for consecutive decades, often running uncontested in elections. This established institutional knowledge can be beneficial to the community, but can also lead to leadership that is accustomed to performance of processes through a manner that has been acceptable as status quo, but may not be efficient by modern standards. At best, this may be a hindrance to development teams; however, in the worst case scenario, it may not meet statutory process guidelines. One example of a professional deficiency that the developer provided was the incorrect citing of statutory allowances. This impactful mistake can disrupt projects, wasting resources (finances). The effect of incorrectly citing an allowance is most pronounced during the initial phases of implementation, as this is when financial arrangements and partnerships are coordinated. For example, a housing development may rely on state funding, non-profit partnerships, and public financing at the same time. If plans must be revisited, causing financial and legal amendments, this can be both timely and costly to a project's budget.

The tribal respondent also described the issue of having a quality point of contact to coordinate the permitting process. According to the developer, a community typically assigns a point person to lead development processes. This serves two key purposes: First, the person functions to organize relevant and necessary staff; second, he or she communicates information between the developer and staff. This role is instrumental to the success of a process' efficiency as there is the ability to align logistically the necessary contacts to ease through the steps of the development process.

The developer described experiences with individuals who have led the process from outside of the collaborative model. Specifically, he stated that if a point of contact lacks ample knowledge of a given

process, this can cause significant delays. In addition, points of contact have erred when they exclude a critical staff member at the beginning of processes. Also, the developer stated that in some cases the point of contact has used the development project to bolster political standing in the community for themselves personally or for their organization. In each example, the result is delays and additional project expenses, as designs and site plans are redone, regulations reviewed, and meetings rescheduled.

According to the developer, because of these issues, he favors the collaborative partnership model in Manistee. The collaboration, which is served by professional staff, at a minimum ensures that proper statutory requirements are met. This in turn promotes approval for a properly structured development project which meets the regulatory standards of that specific unit of government. Regarding collaboration through a county-wide zoning ordinance, the developer noted that a county planning commission would have more competition to serve on, and as a result draw from a larger pool of qualified applicants. Regarding regulatory requirements, as stated by other members of the development community, the knowledge of what is required for a site is a benefit to the development team. This is as basic as outlining what is required within the ordinance so that it can be included and supported as good design, as opposed to leaving design up to the discretion of an appointed or elected body. This latter process causes significant delays when consensus amongst that body may be difficult to achieve for a site and may lead to the tabling of decisions and additional meetings and revisions to a development plan.

Regarding equitable local decision-making, the tribal representative also stated that some local government officials have added barriers to permitting processes for developments coming from the tribe. From the respondent's professional knowledge comparing these experiences to those common in a proficient planning department, these barriers were intentional and have had the effect of deterring development coming specifically from the tribe. In one instance, the additional barriers were so burdensome to the project process that the tribal development team sought formal designation to have a tract of land as 'in-trust'. This was done in order to remove the local government's ability to administer their land use controls.

Analysis

Wexford County

As a result of the interviews and the authors' prior understanding of the JPC Model, Wexford County is what the researchers term the "Grassroots" Model. This conceptualization is based on the model consisting of equal township representation and the absence of county government's involvement. The Joint Municipal Planning Act (Act 226 of 2003) gives individual jurisdictions the legal capacity to collaborate to consider their municipalities in a larger geographic context. For this reason, the Grassroots Model represents the greatest level of coordination between local units of government, as each contributes to the Zoning Ordinance.

There are both structural benefits and one noted drawback to the JPC Grassroots Model. One benefit, in relation to the composition of the JPC, is that each township only needs a single individual to serve on the commission to be represented. This structure alleviates some of the societal concerns discussed earlier in this paper. The consolidation of certain positions will become more of a necessity as civic participation dwindles and the population ages. Rather than needing five or seven members to serve on a local planning commission, the township will only need one in the Grassroots Model. An additional benefit is that all involved townships, as with the other collaborative partnership models, can cost share for professional staff. This was noted by all respondents as a key contributor to facilitating efficient permitting and development processes.

The greatest drawback, however, is that the model works best when the participating local units are relatively uniform in their socioeconomic makeup. More urbanized localities call for greater staffing needs to match permit requests and to oversee a greater number of processes at the same time. Therefore, in the Grassroots Model, the cost to staff support to one urbanized township may require a disproportionate level of funding. While this is dealt with to certain degree by the Wexford model through the way costs are divided (20% equally, 40% on ability to pay, 40% on parcels/expected activity), the model functions best when each township has a relatively similar level of professional need.

Emmet County

Emmet County's single zoning ordinance structure may be considered the Professional Model. Here, one zoning ordinance pertains to the land use of every participating jurisdiction, which has various benefits when staffed at the county level. First, the County Zoning Ordinance is informed by the County Master Plan rather than driven by each individual township, a direct benefit to satisfying Enabling State requirements. Second, the ordinance applies to all the county's unincorporated areas and can be updated without each township needing to provide said updates. Finally, the county actively communicates with participating townships to ensure that land use decisions are both locally considered and relevant to a wider geographic area at the same time. This is also a key drawback to the Professional Model. Mentioned previously, certain permitting decisions must be discussed locally and at the County Planning Commission, thereby doubling the number of required meetings to arrive at a decision. While this can create less efficiency, it also speaks to the communicative relationship between the county and the local units. Therefore, the county does not dictate land use, but rather oversees it by considering local context. Because of its resources and buy-in, the Professional Model best exemplifies the presence of professional planning, staff capacity and resources.

Manistee County

For this study, Manistee County is termed by the authors as the Incremental Model. This model is best for counties with township governments that are interested in collaboration but need to see the benefits before demand is created for the model. Manistee County initially contracted with a small portion of the townships in its purview for a single year in 2018, then renewed for three years at a time starting in 2019. While his model takes time to develop due to its dependency on collaborative relationships, townships have begun to see the benefit of having access to professional staff, and are requesting to join this model.

The greatest drawback of Manistee's Incremental Model is that each of the townships maintains its own Zoning Ordinance, Planning Commission, and Zoning Boards of Appeals. While this allows for

local oversight of processes, it can hinder the county's willingness to take on more service contracts from new townships. This is because instead of administering a single ordinance, such as in Emmet and Wexford, the county may administer seven different Zoning Ordinances. This requires greater staff capacity to accomplish and has prompted discussions amongst the county and some townships to work towards a single county Zoning Ordinance. The single ordinance model, as described by the interviewees, would be favorable from the development community, especially for entities such as the tribal economic developer who have been overburdened by some local units' elected officials. A greater level of professionalism found in a collaborative partnership model can help in maintaining unbiased processes.

Conclusion & Call for Additional Research

The results of this anecdotal study support various suppositions held by the authors prior to the interviews. The themes of consensus, or those identified by the respondents, can all be categorized as having to do with the 'people side' of project implementation. These include the use of regular office hours, or the ability to be timely in acknowledging requests for information and submittals. All agreed that the professionalism of staff supported by the collaborative partnership models was a benefit for various reasons. Professionalism was defined as knowledgeable, well-trained, efficient and personable staff. Lastly, capacity, which was defined as the ability to coordinate a process' timeline and relevant stakeholders efficiently, is critical to a project. Failure to include one person, department or document at any stage can cause project delays and therefore, impacts cost.

For each of these themes, the collaborative partnership models in general were described as advantageous over the predominant structure where rural townships act on their own behalf to administer zoning. This supports the researcher's proposal that rural townships are better served and their development processes better managed when they have access to professional planning staff. This issue is less frequently experienced in more urbanized communities throughout Michigan, or those with a larger tax base. Unfortunately, rural communities often do not have the staffing to be able to support their planning commissions, coordinate other municipal staff or to guide developers. As development pressures

continue to grow in Northwest Michigan, it is reasonable to assume that these issues will become more obvious as a result. Interviewees in this study agreed that collaborative partnership models are a viable solution to this issue.

This paper should serve as an introductory exploration of collaborative partnership models. While the interview process with stakeholders who are working in various models yielded informative results, the scope of this research was limited in some obvious ways. Future research should involve developing a measurement to compare savings to the municipal governments, the developers and other private property owners. Similarly, there should be a greater availability of data that estimates the length of project processes in each of the models. The cost and timeline of projects are critical factors in guiding development.

Additionally, this study did not include: prospective and current property owners. This group also has costs and timelines for permit approval to consider and is a main stakeholder group served by planning and zoning officials. For this reason, future research may include qualitative studies of property owners' experiences in each model, or quantitative studies of their project costs or timeline. However, qualitative studies may pose a greater challenge in studying this group, as this group normally has one-off experiences participating in the model. This is in contrast to developers or local officials who experience collaborative partnership models on a daily basis. Therefore, quantitative research may be better suited to understand property owners' experiences in each model.

This study's methodology should also be increased in scale to more quantitatively organize the information provided in the interviews. For example, a study of 50 counties or regions with collaborative partnership models could include the coding of words or phrases. This may help to expand upon, or more greatly specify, the themes derived from the respondents' interviews. Similarly, the survey structure itself may be modified in future research to use focus groups rather than individual interviews.

Finally, the responses from two of the developers signal more research into the informal versus professional interactions of rural communities that zone without a collaborative partnership model,

compared to those that do. The tribal economic developer who responded to this survey noted that certain local officials or communities created barriers to acquiring permits; these were barriers that were often not presented for permit-seekers not affiliated with the tribal government. In addition, one developer stated that the benefit of working with planning and zoning staff in the collaborative partnership models is the increased professionalism of the process. He described how the success or failure of acquiring a permit in some rural communities is whether or not they personally like the developer or how familiar they are with the developer personally. In both instances, planning and zoning officials are basing land use decisions on subjective personal decision-making rather than sound, professional and legal judgement. Future research may include a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and the equitable local decision-making it affects.

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Appendix A

The following individuals were interviewed with respect to each cooperative land use process and permitting model for each County.

Emmet County:

Executive Staff Member

Tammy Doernenburg, Emmet County Planning & Zoning Director

Ms. Doernenburg has been employed as the Emmet County Planning & Zoning Director since 2011. Previously she had been the Assistant Director and her employment with Emmet County dates back to 1998.

County Planning Commission Member

Tom Urman, Emmet County Planning Commission Chair

Mr. Urman has served in the capacity as a County Planning Commission member for the last ten years. He has served in Planning Commission roles in Bear Creek Township prior to serving on the County PC.

Township Supervisor

Dennis Keiser

Unable to secure interview.

Developer

Doug Mansfield, Owner/CEO of Mansfield Land Use Consultants

Mr. Mansfield started his consulting company in 1999. He had previously been employed as a professional land use consultant for other companies dating back to 1983. He has participated in development processes in many communities and extensively in Emmet County. Doug Mansfield is also the Union Township (Grand Traverse County) Supervisor.

Wexford County

Executive Staff Member

Robert Hall, Wexford County Joint Planning Commission Zoning Administrator

Mr. Hall has been employed as the Zoning Administrator for the Wexford County Joint Planning Commission since 2017. Previously he had been employed as a Zoning Administrator for several communities including the City of White Cloud and Norman Township, with his experience dating back many years.

Joint Planning Commission Member

Paul Osborne, Wexford County Joint Planning Commission Chair

Mr. Osborne has served on the Joint Planning Commission as the Chair since its initiation in 2017. He had previously served on the Wexford County Planning Commission for over 30 years prior to its dis-establishment in 2016.

Developer

Robb Munger, Real Estate Developer with Vanguard Construction

Mr. Munger has experience with real estate development dating back to 1996 with his initial development activities occurring in Caledonia, MI. He has navigated development processes in Wexford County since 2017.

Manistee County

Executive Staff Member

Mike Szkola, Manistee County Planning Director

Mr. Szkola has been employed as the Manistee County Planning Director since 2020. Previously he had served as a County Planner within the County Planning Department dating back to 2018.

County Planning Commission Member

Mary Becker-Witt, Manistee County Planning Commission Chair

Ms. Becker-Witt has served several non-consecutive terms on the Manistee County Planning Commission dating back to the early 2000's. Her most recent term was initiated in 2018.

Township Supervisor

Wayne Beldo, Maple Grove Township Supervisor

Mr. Beldo has served in a capacity as a Township official for Maple Grove Township for the better part of 30 years. Mr. Beldo has also served the capacity as a Township Zoning Administrator in times of transition or lack of staffing capacity at the Township. Maple Grove Township is not currently under contract for Zoning Services with Manistee County.

Developer, Little River Holdings LLC (Little River Band of Ottawa Indians)

Tyler Leppinen, Chief Operating Officer, Little River Holdings LLC

Mr. Leppinen has been the CEO with Little River Holdings LLC since 2021. He had previously been the Economic Development Coordinator for the Tribe dating back to 2018. Prior to that, Mr. Leppinen held the position as the Downtown Development Authority Director for the City of Manistee.

Developer

Tim Morley, Youngs Construction

Unable to secure interview.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Executive Staff

1. Describe the model structure for the department/collaborative, and the history of its initiation. What successes have been witnessed? What failures or hindrances have been identified? What changes would you institute to improve upon the model concept?
2. What is the organizational flow and interconnection to the County/Collaborative of processes below, with the questions building upon various permit requirements and integration of local and State agency approvals.
 - Land Use Permitting (focus of discussion)
3. Included for discussion of coordination of the level of ease of obtaining all necessary permits.
 - a. Address Issuance
 - b. Soil Erosion Permitting
 - c. Environmental (Well/Septic) Permitting

- d. Building Permits
 - e. State Water/Coastal Resource Permitting
 - f. Driveway Permits
4. Who is included in the decision-making process? Who do you wish was included in the process, or removed from the process?
 5. What methods of transparency are included in the process, including those required by legislative acts as well as additional measures if undertaken by County/Collaborative? Public involvement?
 6. Oversight by elected bodies and appointed bodies. Planning commission? Elected board? Participant backgrounds/knowledge required? Education and training opportunities? Compensation (mileage reimbursements, Per Diem)?
 7. Technological offerings, access and use? Web presence for policy and regulatory documents, permit submission, payment and contact information?
 8. Fiscal structure and capacity support. Budget make-up and breakdown? Buy-in by local units? Schedule of service levels? (Understood that structure make-up of model can dictate fiscal structure.)
 9. Please provide a copy of the by-laws of the respective oversight body.

Local Unit Officials

1. Who are you and what is your role within the local unit of government? Describe your community (size, anecdotal trends in terms of development and citizen make-up).
2. What is your local unit's relationship within the collaborative model offered within the county? How was that relationship forged? Were there specific issues that premeditated your community's collaboration within the model?
3. What is your impression of the model, and the model function? Expanded with questions towards (efficiency, expense, professionalism, technology, support, etc.)
4. Speak to experience with local unit (township) professional staff, and experience with county professional staff if applicable?
5. What challenges have you witnessed/identified with the collaborative efforts? Have efforts been made to improve upon identified challenges or for improvement of the model process in general?
6. What is the impression of the collaborative model within your community? Have you identified any anecdotal evidence from discussions with citizens and developers that you can share?
7. Would you recommend this type of collaborative process to other local unit officials and units of government?

Planning Commission Members (Both for Collaborative Models and Local Unit Members)

1. Who are you and what is role with the collaborative/County planning commission? Describe your planning commission (size, representation, knowledge and background).
2. What is the planning commission and collaborative entities relationship with participating local units of government? How were and for what reasons were the relationships forged? Were there specific issues that led to inclusion of communities within the collaborative model?

3. What is your impression of the model, and the model function? Expanded with questions towards (efficiency, expense, professionalism, technology, support, etc.)
4. Speak to experience with County professional staff, and experience with local unit (Township/Village) professional staff if applicable?
5. What challenges have you witnessed/identified with the collaborative efforts? Have efforts been made to improve upon identified challenges or for improvement of the model process in general?
6. What is the impression of the collaborative model within the community? Have you identified any anecdotal evidence from discussions with citizens or developers that you can share?
7. What is your overall impression of the process, model and final thoughts for improvement?

Developers

1. Who are you and what is your company or employer? What type of development do you undertake? How long have you been in business? How long have you worked within the respective county?
2. Have you had experience developing within and outside of the collaborative model?
 - a. How was the experience without the collaborative model? How did the process function (timeline, staffing and professionalism, technology for permitting/payment/etc., communication, etc.)?
3. What is your overall impression without a collaborative process within a county?
4. What challenges have you witnessed/identified within the single local unit oversight of the development process outside of the collaborative model?
5. What benefits if any have you identified within the single local unit oversight of the development process outside of the collaborative model?
 - a. How was the experience within the collaborative model? How did the process function (timeline, staffing and professionalism, technology for permitting/payment/etc., communication, etc.)?
6. What is your overall impression with a collaborative process within a county?
7. What challenges have you witnessed/identified with the collaborative efforts?
8. What benefits have you witnessed/identified with the collaborative process model?
9. What changes would you implement in order to improve the collaborative efforts?
10. What is the overall impression when comparing both the collaborative and non-collaborative models?
11. What would your overall support and recommendation be for development processes that would create efficiencies, cost savings and meet the development community needs?

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