

Why Cooperate And For What Results?

Local Cooperative Efforts to Manage Regional Growth in Michigan

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Obstacles to cooperation:

- Turf problems and trust issues
- Lack of money to sustain effort
- Issue not ripe for action
- Unwillingness to compromise
- Prior annexation issues
- Inability to reach agreement
- Lack of communication

Key questions: What is the extent of land use cooperation in Michigan? What factors affect cooperation on land use issues?

Methods: Survey of local elected officials and planning commissioners, and case studies of successful efforts at cooperation

Factors indispensable for successful cooperation:

- Leadership
- Building of trust over time through smaller collaborative projects
- Having a formal organization for institutional memory
- Working through a regional plan
- Role of the county as a neutral facilitator and for technical assistance
- Communication back and forth between respective boards and chief elected officials
- Commitment to NOT leave the table irrespective of progress or lack thereof
- Information from seminars, workshops and planner networks
- Good relationship between consultants and county planning department

Results:

Staffing: Only a third of local governments employ full time planning and zoning staff. About half (49%) employ part time staff, and most respondents rely on consultants to provide primary assistance for plan preparation.

Service Delivery: Nearly all respondents reported cooperation on service delivery. Fire, Water and Sewer, and Parks were identified as services most commonly addressed.

Land Use: Fifty percent of respondents indicated some level of cooperation on land use related activities, ranging from informal talks to formal means such as establishing joint plans and ordinances and forming Joint Planning Commissions. One in four respondents reported having experienced an **unsuccessful** attempt to cooperate on planning and zoning issues.

Involvement: Active participation of citizens, citizens groups, and businesses was significantly related to cooperation on planning and zoning. Support for cooperative initiatives by Planning Commissions, staff, and citizens was significantly related to whether cooperation occurred. The extent to which county planning agencies provided financial incentives was also significantly related to whether local governments cooperate on planning and zoning issues.

Conclusion:

Most survey respondents indicate the need for “carrots” to induce cooperation.

Policy responses might include:

- Establishing formal dispute resolution/negotiation agencies for use by local governments
- Linking other land use related legislation (e.g. commerce centers) to cooperative planning
- Mentorship connecting communities attempting cooperation with others that have had success

