

Charlevoix County Planning Commission and Planning Department 2009 Local Officials Survey

Summary

Charlevoix County Planning Commission and Planning Department services are utilized by most Charlevoix County townships and cities. This survey was sent to all city and township planning commission members, ZBA members and elected officials to learn how planning commission and planning department services are utilized and valued, and what services and training would be most useful in the future.

110 surveys were returned of the 255 sent, a 43 percent return rate. The largest groups of respondents were planning commissioners (41 percent), elected officials (31 percent) and zoning board of appeals members (24 percent). Nearly one-half had been in their current role for 5 years or less. Most lived in a township.

Results

Who contacts the planning commission and planning department?

Zoning administrators and planning commission chairpersons were most frequently identified as the persons who have contact with the planning commission and planning department. Most respondents (62 percent) had not personally contacted the planning department or planning commission within the past year. Of those who did, most interacted with the commission/department one to five times.

How are county planning commission/planning department zoning ordinance and master plan reviews perceived and utilized?

State statute requires county planning commission review of proposed township zoning ordinance changes, including rezoning, and new and revised master plans from all jurisdictions. In fact, 72 percent of survey respondents indicated that their community had submitted a zoning ordinance change or revised master plan to the county planning commission within the past three years¹.

Nearly all respondents said that the reviews were at least somewhat useful in making revisions and adopting ordinance or plan changes (see chart 1). Respondents commented that they liked the timeliness and thoroughness of the reviews and gained useful suggestions. Some, on the other hand, believed that the reviews were not timely, too detailed or didn't reflect enough understanding of their specific situation. The most frequent suggestions for making the reviews more informative and useful included conducting reviews earlier in the process, having more direct contact with local planning commissions and attending their meetings.

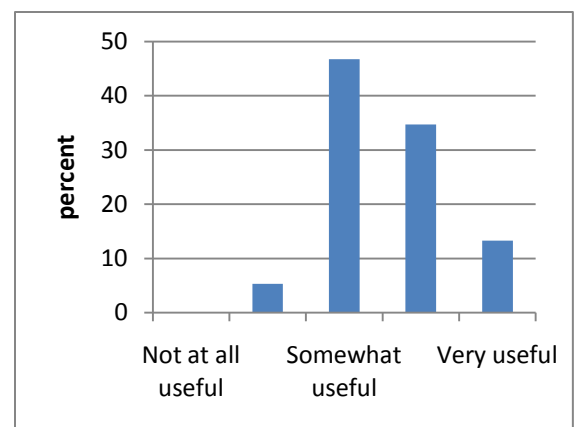


Chart 1: Usefulness of the Planning Commission and Planning Department master plan and zoning ordinance reviews.

¹ This is *not* the same as saying that 72 percent of *communities* submitted plans or ordinances. Since more than one individual may have responded to this survey from each community, the percent of *actual communities* submitting plans and or ordinances may be greater than or less than 72 percent.

When asked why the county planning commission reviews local zoning ordinances and plans, responses generally fell into four categories - that they were, 1) required by law, 2) help to coordinate efforts between townships, cities and the county, 3) help with consistency and continuity of plans and ordinances and, 4) help ensure conformity with county planning and vision, rules and regulations.

What other planning commission and planning department services are local officials using?

In addition to required plan and ordinance reviews, 62 percent of the respondents indicated that they or their community utilized a variety of planning commission and planning department services, most commonly:

- Land use information
- Internet/county web site assistance
- Technical planning advice
- Pre-hearing review of ordinances and or plans
- Research on planning-related topics

Local officials rated as important or very important the planning commission and planning department role to facilitate and coordinate planning activities between Charlevoix County townships, cities and villages (see chart 2).

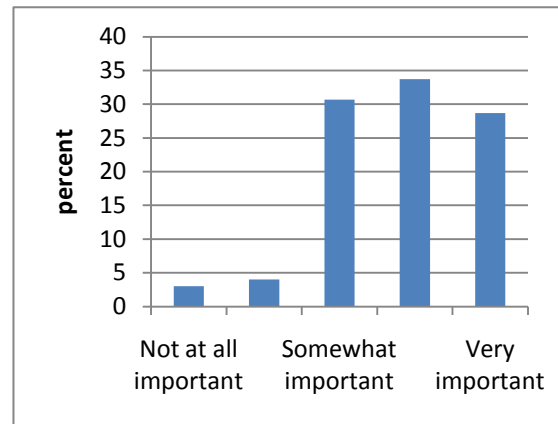


Chart 2: Importance of the Planning Commission and Planning Department facilitating and coordinating role.

What training do local officials want?

Most respondents indicated interest in a variety of training programs. The top selections, in order of interest, included:

- Wind energy
- Recreation planning and grant sources
- ZBA operations, responsibilities and processes
- Water and riparian rights
- Right to farm act and zoning
- Historic preservation
- Legal aspects of land use

Local officials preferred to receive training through evening workshops at a central location, special presentations in their communities, and short informational DVDs that can be played during meetings.

Next steps

The Charlevoix County Planning Commission and Planning Department will use these results to guide their services for 2010 and beyond. The complete survey results are available on the Charlevoix County web site, www.charlevoixcounty.org/planning.asp.