

**village of  
Benzonia**

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**public participation  
plan**

**September 2022**

THIS PLAN WAS APPROVED AT THE REGULAR  
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON 9/15/22



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# Public Participation Plan

The Village of Benzonia is engaged in the Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) Program, which is administered by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). Creating a public participation plan or P3, as referred to by the MEDC RRC program, will allow the Village to engage the public during substantive planning, zoning, and development projects. This plan will provide a strategy to document and analyze information on participation efforts allowing the Village of Benzonia to more objectively assess its efforts and adjust accordingly, thereby creating an effective set of best practices to consult for future uses.

## Overview & Purpose

The Village of Benzonia has developed this Public Participation Plan to serve as a guide to gather public input during the planning and development review and approval process. This plan shall outline a process for seeking and gathering public input, and to create a uniform understanding of all requirements and goals that the Village will use when making decisions. The Village already engages with the public throughout the planning and development process - however, this plan will aim to increase transparency and predictability between the Village and local stakeholders. The plan will be updated as needed.

Citizen engagement through a planning process is crucial to the success and effectiveness of the plan. By providing an opportunity for community input, village officials and administrators ensure community stakeholders have an opportunity to “by-in” to their governing plan. Such a process also enhances both the ability and responsibility of public participants to affect the Village’s future. If requested, the Village of Benzonia shall assist developers/applicants in soliciting input from neighboring stakeholders and the public in general, early on and throughout the planning process, to ensure their understanding and acceptance and will endeavor to work with all parties to prevent obstacles from arising late in the process. In circumstances when the village consults with a third-party entity, that entity shall adhere to the provisions of this Plan, if applicable.

**“Public Participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.”**

— International Association of Public Participation, Core Values

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## Goals & Objectives

Goals and objectives that describe a course of action are a tool for future decision-making and help to define the character, values, and priorities of the Village community. Goals are broad statements that describe a desired outcome, where we want to be. Goals are often long-term in scope. Objectives are a program, action, or practice that supports one or more policy statements. Objectives address at a high level, the “who, what, when, where, and how” of reaching a goal.

In order to be consistent the goal of this participation plan should also be consistent and support the goals and objectives that were established in the Village Master Plan 2020, both documents should be reviewed and coordinated over time.

### **GOAL:**

To seek broad identification and representative involvement of all residents in the Village for all planning and development matters that directly affect Village residents. The Village of Benzonia strives to involve the community in the decision-making process and use various methods of communications and outreach in order to best understand resident desires.

### **Objectives:**

- Oversee all efforts of public participation in an open manner, by making participation accessible to any stakeholder wishing to participate.
- Exhaust every effort to ensure public participation through all stages of the planning and review processes.
- Distribute information and solicit feedback through every communicative effort available to the Village (Newspaper, website and social media).
- Public involvement methods are continuously evolving, the Village is committed to seeking new and innovative ways to keep the public involved in design processes.
- Continually updated this public participation plan, the Planning Commission will review and consider public engagement activities that occurred over the year as part of its Annual Report and make recommendations for updates.

### **GOAL:**

To solicit public participation in all phases of planning projects; including but not limited to - master planning projects or updates, park planning, street and infrastructure planning, or any other type of beautification planning that directly affects the look and feel of Village neighborhoods or streets. The earlier the public is involved in the process the greater the opportunity to influence important land-use decisions.

### **Objectives:**

- The Village, in coordination with the Planning Commission (or subcommittee), will invite the public to participate in the planning and development of public projects in a public open house type format to comment and provide ideas about uses, function, and design within the area.

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- Keep public feedback methods open during the duration of a public planning project (such as website comment forms, discussions at open meetings (Council and PC meetings, etc.) to allow public feedback through the project's entirety.
- Record results of public engagement and recount these results back to the public during a public project.
- Recognize that no single way of soliciting public feedback will work in all instances, be flexible and consider special circumstances to ensure public feedback for all public development projects.

## **GOAL:**

During the development process; to resolve stakeholder concerns up front and increase diversity in opinion. This will increase flexibility and ease by removing unforeseen barriers and obstacles posed by public concern.

## **Objectives:**

- Applicants on new development projects of significant size will be encouraged to provide public informational and feedback opportunities prior to filing land use applications, regardless of land use permit type.
- Solicit public participation in each phase of planning processes.
- Hold public meeting or open houses in accordance with Michigan Planning and Enabling laws.
- Record results of public engagement and recount these results back to the public (website or social media, etc.) during all development projects

## **Public Participation Requirements**

The Village not only desires input from public stakeholders, but is guided and enabled to do so through Michigan State Statutes.

### **Michigan Open Meetings Act**

All government entities must adhere to PA 267 of 1976, the Michigan Open Meetings Act.

- The Village will post a list of dates, times, and locations of all meetings for the calendar year on the Village's website. ([www.villagebenzonia.com](http://www.villagebenzonia.com))
- If there is a change in schedule, the Village will post a notice with the new dates, times, and locations within three days of the altered meeting.
- The Village will post a notice indicating a special or irregular meeting at least 18 hours in advance.

### **Michigan Planning Enabling Act**

The following parties will be notified by the Planning Commission (by first class mail, personal delivery, or e-mail) of intent to plan and request comment.

- The county, and other adjacent local jurisdictions (Villages and Townships)

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- The regional planning commission (Networks Northwest for the Village as there is no County or other Regional Planning Authority).
  - Each public utility, railroad, and public transportation entity that operates on or owns public space in the City
  - The county road commission and the Michigan Department of Transportation if the master plan includes a master streets plan.

## **Michigan Zoning Enabling Act**

In accordance with the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006), consideration of the following required advertised public hearings pursuant to the Open Meetings Act:

- Zoning text amendments
- Zoning map amendments
- Variances
- Appeals/Interpretations
- Special land uses
- In all the above cases, the Village of Benzonia shall provide public notice of the hearing in a newspaper of general circulation in the area not less than 15 days before the date of the hearing and all persons to whom real property is assessed within 300 feet of the subject property and to the occupants of all structures within 300 of the subject property shall be notified.

## **Key Stakeholders**

This Plan identifies important groups that can assist and enhance the public participation process, as well as identify groups that are not often at the visioning table. The following list represents a diverse set of individuals, groups and organizations that may be interested in or affected by various planning and development projects Possible key stakeholders include, but are not limited to:

- Local residents
- Village Council/ Zoning Board of Appeals
- Planning Commission
- Benzie County Government and Departments/Committees (Emergency Management, Building Safety and Codes, etc.)
- Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department
- Benzie County Road Commission
- Benzie Chamber of Commerce
- Benzie Central Public Schools
- Commercial Developers, Brokers, Real Estate Professionals, Potential Investors
- Networks Northwest
- Local Business Owners
- Community, Civic and Social Groups
- Students and Student Groups

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- Neighboring Communities
- State Agencies (EGLE, MDOT, etc.)

Engagement from these groups above may vary depending on the project that is on the table, however the Village is committed to making a concerted effort to reach out and involve potential stakeholders listed above in an effort to gain the best insights possible on various planning and/or development projects.

## Opportunities for Public Participation

The Village provides residents and stakeholders with numerous opportunities to get involved in the planning, review, and approval processes.

### Development Review Bodies

**Village Council:** The Village Council is the legislative and policy-making body for the Village government. The Village President and other Council roles are elected positions. The Village Council also serves as the Zoning Board of Appeals for the Village.

**Planning Commission:** The Planning Commission is largely responsible for the Village master plan, zoning ordinance and reviewing special land use development projects. Members are appointed by the Village president to 3 year terms. The Planning Commission also has administrative role. This means that they are permitted or required by statute or ordinance to conduct formal reviews and issue administrative decisions. These decisions are then sent to the Village Council as official recommendations.

**Committees:** The Planning Commission is in the process of establishing Advisory Committees made up of Village residents, business owners and/or other Community leaders to help guide the planning commission on various projects and help implement identified tasks from the master plan. The Village is actively seeking volunteers for this role. Typically, advisory committees would have a work agenda in place for a calendar year during which it undertakes a few projects of their choosing - as influenced by tasks identified in the master plan. The Advisory Committee(s) make recommendation or report to the Planning Commission.

The Village encourages citizen participation in local government planning and policy decisions. Therefore, all citizens are invited to apply for appointments to the Village's Commission and Committees. These groups provide recommendations to the Village Council on a variety of topics and issues.

The Village Council is responsible for making the final decisions on most issues or topics, but it will look to these groups for advice, background information, and analysis. As the elected body, the Village Council has discretion to accept advice in full, in part, or not at all.

### Public Meetings

In addition to conformance to the Open Meetings Act, meeting agendas and packets of the Village Council, Planning Commission should be made available on the Village's website in advance of the meetings. The meeting agenda and packet should be sent, by mail or e-mail, to all land use applicants that require a



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public meeting. Once approved, Meeting minutes of the Village Council and Planning Commissions should be posted on the Village's website, and made available at the Village Office.

The Village office has limited space for large public meetings. When a large public meeting is expected the Village typically will hold the meeting at the Benzonia Township Hall or the Benzonia Public Library. The public meeting announcement are to be noted accordingly.

## **Public Comments**

Opportunities for public comment shall be available at any meeting of the Village Council or Planning Commission in accordance with the provisions in the bylaws and other operating policies. The meeting agenda should allow for public comments under a 'Public Comment' section. The participation of interested persons and their input shall be recorded in the meeting minutes. Approved meeting minutes, which include the outcome of the public participation, are made available to the public through various methods, including being posted on the Village's website.

## **Public Hearings**

The Village Council and Planning Commission shall hold public hearings when called for in their local and State enabling legislation, or when otherwise prudent, to provide the opportunity for public comment on specific topics. As noted above, the Village office has limited space for large public meetings. Public hearings are typically held at the Benzonia Township Hall or the Benzonia Public Library.

The Planning Commission shall consider holding public hearings for all land use and development applications (site plan, special land use permit, or rezoning request) that come before them though this is not required by State law to do so for all applications. The Zoning Administrator shall schedule and publish the notification of a public hearing before the Planning Commission in a newspaper of general distribution in the City not less than 15 days prior to the hearing on a site plan application as mandated by the commission's bylaws. Land use and development application notifications shall be sent by mail to the applicant, the owner of the subject property, and the owners of property within 300 feet of the subject property. The Planning Commission meeting agenda and meeting packet shall be made available on the Village's website in advance of the meeting. The applicant and the Village Council shall receive written notification of the Planning Commission's recommendation.

The Village Council shall hold a public hearing when called for in their enabling legislation. On receipt of the report of the Planning Commission, the Village Council shall set a date for a public hearing for consideration of any proposed zoning ordinance update or rezoning. State and federal statutes require that special use permits and rezoning applications be noticed in a newspaper of general distribution in the City no less than 15 days prior to the City Council public hearing. Application notifications shall also be sent by mail to the applicant, the owner of the subject property, and the owners of property within 300 feet of the subject property.

The special use permit applicant and the Zoning Administrator are notified in writing of the Village Council's action by the Village Clerk within five days of the action. Following adoption of an ordinance to amend or

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update the zoning district boundaries or the district regulations, the ordinance shall be filed with the Village Clerk and a notice of the ordinance adoption shall be published in a major local newspaper of general circulation within 15 days after adoption.

## Toolbox of Strategies

There are many ways to accomplish successful public participation. The methods will need to vary depending on the current need. The following list is flexible and should change to best accommodate the needs and circumstances of a specific situation.

### Basic Announcement Methods For Public Meetings

The following methods are used to advertise the public meetings of the Village Council, Planning Commission, and other committees acting as advisory bodies when taking action on land use or development applications. Many times, this does not result in involvement of all stakeholders, especially those with visual impairments, non-English speakers, those who are illiterate, youth, individuals with mobility limitations, and those who work during the time in which public meetings are commonly held.

- Newspaper posting
- Website posting
- Email group messaging
- Flier posting on Village Office door and other community locations (Post office, Library, etc.)
- Announcements at council meetings
- Postcard or Newsletter mailings

The Village will strive to ensure that more than one notification and communication method will be used depending on the specific project and target audience.

### Proactive Practices

The following are some example public participation methods that are less reactive and more focused on education and collaboration. Some of these methods have been used by the Village in the past, while others may be best utilized as increased intensity of planning and development projects occur in the Village in the future

- Pre-Application Coordination. Prior to submitting an application, or site plan, an applicant may choose to submit a sketch plan or draft plan for review by the Zoning Administrator and/or Planning Commission. The review shall be informal and advisory only and shall not constitute any form of approval or authorization of granting any type of permit. The review shall be done without cost to the applicant and shall be scheduled as an item of business on the Planning Commission's agenda.
- Surveys. Surveys are useful for identifying specific areas of interest or concentration from a broad scope of ideas or issues. These areas of interest can then be further explored using other methods like the ones outlined below. A community may use a survey to identify where to start in the planning

process or the general climate surrounding a topic. Surveys can be useful to get a general idea of public opinion regarding specific community issues but should not be used as the sole method of public input. It is helpful for a municipality to administer surveys with partners. For example, schools can send surveys home with children or churches can have them available to fill out and neighborhood groups can put them in mail boxes. As with most public input efforts, it is best to vary the delivery method (mailed, handed out, electronic) and include bilingual language in certain cases.

- Open House Meetings and Community Workshops. Open house meetings and community workshops can be as simple as a series of question and answer sessions with the public or as creative as interactive map exercises. Formal presentations can be given to a large audience and then less formal exchange of information may follow. They provide a more casual and fun setting to encourage participants to think critically and creatively about important issues. Oftentimes open house meetings are a great way to educate the community surrounding a specific topic and hear concerns, questions, and ideas. As noted above, open house venues need to be accessible and approachable for all attendees. Further, volunteers must be available and knowledgeable on a project to encourage feedback from participants. An orientation session is essential prior to commencement.



Community Workshop held at the Benzonia Public Library during the Master Plan Development, July 2019

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- Charrettes. A charrette differs from a workshop because it is often a multi-day event where designers and planners work collaboratively. Citizens offer ideas while the charrette team facilitates and observes. This tool may most often be used for specific development projects that involve significant changes to form or land use and require public input on the design layout. The Village may encourage developers to hold charrettes for specific proposed projects with significant community interest.
- Walking Tours. Walking tours allow more candid and casual feedback from participants. They can be paired with community workshops or charrettes to measure the perceived safety and comfort of pedestrians in a downtown, neighborhood or corridor. Walking tours are also useful for identifying desired design, problem properties, or safety concerns.
- One-on-One Interviews. Interviews are a great way to get specifics on a topic. Specific community leaders may have been identified, making them ideal candidates for an interview. Some communities have individuals that are very vocal about issues in the community. Interviewing them may give some perspective on how to address their concerns. It is important to remember that one interview reflects the opinion of one individual and should not be considered the standing of the entire community.
- Focus Groups. Like interviews, focus groups can help to narrow down concepts or get a specific side of the story from different perspectives. Focus groups can be used to invite multiple stakeholders to the table to gather perspectives and interests of various in one setting.
- Social Media / Web Presence. Depending on the type of project, information should be incorporated into on-line sources. Further, more intensive projects may have project-specific websites not only to provide information but to allow for comments and interaction. Technology offers a unique opportunity to give and receive information to a mass of people. The Village may post events, share information on projects and planning and developments processes, and even solicit feedback.

## Outreach Strategies

The goal of this section is to outline how the Village should plan ahead for public input and involve the public sooner rather than later in the development process, by helping citizens and other stakeholders to be more involved in the creation process and not simply a reaction to a finished product. Pro-actively engaging stakeholders fosters a sense of ownership and prevents delays caused by unforeseen issues. The following are times that the public should be involved.

### Master Plan Update

As the visionary policy document for future development in the Village, the master planning process must use a wide range of public input methods to develop the goals, objectives and strategies for implementation. The Village of Benzonia shall follow, at a minimum, the provisions of Michigan Public Act 33 of 2008, as amended (the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, M.C.L. 125.3801 et. seq.) for the adoption of a new master plan or of an update to the master plan. Previous planning efforts included public survey, stakeholder input, and public workshops to solicit community feedback that were above and beyond the minimum statute requirements.

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## **Park and Recreation Plan Update**

The Village has chosen to include the park and recreation plan within the master plan document with the intent to update it as required by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) every 5-years in order to stay eligible for state recreation funding. Public participation should again be, at minimum, as required by the MDNR in order to meet their requirements.

## **Zoning Ordinance Update**

The zoning ordinance is a document that reflects the vision of the community by regulating the character and type of development. To this end, it is important the public be involved in the adoption of amendments to the zoning map or to specific regulations contained in the text of the zoning ordinance. As each amendment process is unique and not necessarily related to the entire document, the stakeholders may vary to some extent. However, a general process of public outreach will contain early and frequent public input and a continuous facilitation of involvement throughout the decision-making process. The creation of citizen study groups, or ad-hoc committees, or workshops with directly affected property owners will be encouraged when tackling more complicated issues.

Particular attention should be paid to public outreach and communication when dealing with controversial zoning ordinance amendments or controversial development proposals. The website shall be updated regularly on decision-making processes and projects and announcements should be made via social media and the Village email message board.

## **The Development of Publicly-Owned Properties**

On occasion the Village may make improvements to Village owned property. When the improvements are significant enough the public should be made aware and brought into the process for public input and feedback. Significant public projects may include; streetscape projects, major public building improvements, park improvements (particularly improvements that require grants or propose significant changes to public facilities in the parks that may affect users, neighbors, streets, etc.), public property acquisitions or dissolution, etc.

## **Capital Improvement Program Planning**

A capital improvement program (CIP) plan is a short-range plan, typically four to ten years, which identifies capital projects and equipment purchases, a ranking of projects and purchases in order of preference, the plan for financing the items, a timetable for the construction or completion of the project, justification for the project, and an explanation of expenses for the project. The Village has not yet created a CIP plan, however it is required as a part of the RRC certification process. The Village should work with appropriate stakeholders to make the best use of public funds when developing the CIP. While planning for capital improvements may be more technical and difficult engage the public, Village Council should hold a public hearing for the adoption of the CIP plan and post the plan in an easily-accessible location on the Village's website for the public to view.

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## Major Developments

The Village shall follow, at a minimum, the provisions of the local and State regulations, as listed in this guide, to review development projects that involve the approval of planning and zoning applications and permits. This applies to the review process for site plans and special use permits, rezoning requests, and variance request applications. In many circumstances, the Village Council and Planning Commission will hold public hearings, noticed in accordance with the State legislation, and allow for public comment on the proposed development project during its regular meetings. Depending on the nature of project, the community interest, and community's financial involvement, additional methods of engagement may be used to gather community feedback.

## Communicating Results

Communicating back to the public the information gathered during the public involvement process will result in another layer of transparency and a greater understanding from the public that we value public input and are actively seeking to involve the citizens in the community. Municipalities have many venues of communication: television, newsletters, the municipal website, social media. The appropriate venue to communicate, who is responsible for this communication and how soon after the public participation event are all dependent on the situation at hand.

There is no one way of communicating. In general, the following is a list of ways the Village will to strive communicate public feedback.

- Public meetings. Village Council, Planning Commission meetings minutes shall be posted on the Village's website.
- Surveys. Surveys created by Village staff will be compiled by a designated staff person, and the Village shall have results posted after the survey completion. The results, or a link to the results, may be posted on-line and on social media and published in the Village newsletter.
- Open Houses / Community workshops / Charrettes. A Village official will be charged with taking notes during public open houses, community workshops, or charrettes and getting names, addresses, and emails of all in attendance. In addition, the results of these events shall be sent to participants via email, and the meeting summary shall be publicized at other public meetings such as Village Council and Planning Commission.
- Social Networking/Village Website. At this time response to public posts and communication of announcements is fluid and not an official method of communication from the Village to the public, although many announcements will be posted this way. An official process for communicating via social media platforms and the website could be developed in the future.

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## Public Participation Evaluation

Evaluation of public participation methods are a necessity for the improvement of the public participation plan. Basic surveys should be offered or made available on the Village website with the intention of requesting feedback on the effectiveness of public outreach. This is especially important after major planning projects, such as the master plan updates, or after intense or controversial development projects. Surveys should be requested from internal Village participants as well as external stakeholders or participants. Evaluation of public outreach methods should be managed by the Planning Commission and Village staff.

This guide will be formally reviewed on an annual basis as a part of the Planning Commission's annual report. A Village official will be responsible for keeping records of the participation efforts and will be responsible for compiling the data and presenting it to the Village and public with suggestions for actions. The results should identify strengths and weaknesses and give examples of how to adjust our behavior to better maximize outreach.