

**Memorandum**

TO: Portage City Council  
FROM: Brett Hanlon, MEDC Redevelopment Ready Communities  
DATE: Planner April 15, 2019  
RE: **City of Portage RRC Baseline Report**

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The Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) Team is pleased to present the City of Portage with an RRC Baseline Report. The report assesses Portage's development-related plans, policies and processes and outlines ways in which the city can align its practices with the RRC best practices. Aligning with the RRC best practices and achieving RRC certification will assist Portage in attracting business and talent.

The evaluation snapshot, located on page five of the baseline report, illustrates how the six RRC best practices are divided into 40 measurable criteria; and it shows Portage is currently meeting 68% of the of the RRC best practices and is in the process of completing an additional 32%. Green indicates the best practice criterion has been met; yellow indicates some of the best practice component is in place; and red (of which the city has none) means the city has done little to implement that particular best practice.

The baseline report identifies numerous practices that are working well for the city, as well as areas in which the city could work to improve. Portage's strengths currently lie in detailed long-range plans, predictable zoning regulations and a streamlined development review process. Challenges for the city include visioning for priority redevelopment sites and creating overarching marketing and economic development strategies

Upon the review of the baseline report, the RRC team asks that the city pass a resolution to proceed in the RRC program. This resolution will confirm that the city is committed to working toward administering the RRC best practices. Portage can work at its own pace to align with the RRC best practices and achieve RRC certification. To achieve RRC certification, it is suggested the city create a work plan or use the estimated time frames in the baseline report to prioritize RRC tasks.

Technical assistance match funding will become available to Portage upon the passing of the aforementioned resolution and the completion of the city's first quarterly progress report—which will be provided three months from the date of this memo by the RRC Team. The RRC Team has a suite of resources that can assist Portage in achieving RRC certification. Through the RRC Team's ongoing relationship with city staff, I will ensure the city has access to the resources it desires. The RRC Team is looking forward to working with the city throughout the RRC certification process. We view this report as the beginning of a partnership that will continue for years to come.

Respectfully,



Brett Hanlon, AICP



redevelopment ready  
communities®

# RRC Baseline Report

City of Portage

March 2019

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MICHIGAN ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) is a certification program supporting community revitalization and the attraction and retention of businesses, entrepreneurs and talent throughout Michigan. RRC promotes communities to be development ready and competitive in today's economy by actively engaging stakeholders and proactively planning for the future—making them more attractive for projects that create places where people want to live, work and invest.

To become formally engaged in the RRC program, communities must complete a self-evaluation of their development-related practices, attend the RRC Best Practice Training Series and have the governing body pass a resolution of intent, outlining the value the community sees in participating in the program. Portage completed the best practice training series in June 2017, passed a resolution of intent to participate in July 2017 and submitted a self-evaluation—thus becoming engaged

in the RRC program—in November 2017.

Each of the six RRC Best Practices outlined in this report were developed in conjunction with experts in the public and private sector and they serve as the standard to achieve certification as a Redevelopment Ready Community®. RRC certification signals to investors, businesses and residents working within a community that they can expect a consistent, efficient, fair development review process.

Portage's strengths currently lie in detailed long-range plans, predictable zoning regulations and a streamlined development review process. Challenges of the city include visioning for priority redevelopment sites and creating overarching marketing and economic development strategies. With this report, resources provided through the RRC program and input from the city's involved residents and stakeholders, the city will be able to complete all the unmet RRC best practices and achieve certification.

The basic assessment tool for evaluation is the RRC Best Practices. The six best practices address key elements of community and economic development. A community must demonstrate all of the RRC Best Practice components have been met to become RRC certified. Once received, certification is valid for three years.

A community's plans, processes and policies are measured against the RRC Best Practices through an RRC team evaluation that consists of research and interviews, as well as the consulting advice and technical expertise of the RRC advisory council. The team analyzes a community's development materials, including, but

not limited to: the master plan; redevelopment strategy; capital improvements plan; budget; public participation plan; zoning regulations; development procedures; meeting minutes; economic development strategy; marketing strategies; and website. In confidential interviews, the team also records the input of local business owners and developers who have worked with the community.

A community's degree of attainment for each best practice criteria is visually represented in this report by the following:

	Green indicates the best practice component is currently being met by the community.
	Yellow indicates some of the best practice component may be in place, but additional action is required.
	Red indicates the best practice component is not present or is significantly outdated.

This report represents the evaluation baseline of Portage's redevelopment processes and practices. All questions should be directed to the RRC team at [RRC@michigan.org](mailto:RRC@michigan.org).

Portage is currently meeting 68 percent of the Redevelopment Ready Communities® best practices and is in the process of completing an additional 32 percent.

<b>1.1.1</b>	<b>1.1.2 (N/A)</b>	<b>1.1.3</b>	<b>1.1.4</b>	<b>1.2.1</b>	<b>1.2.2</b>	<b>1.2.3</b>
<b>2.1.1</b>	<b>2.1.2</b>	<b>2.1.3</b>	<b>2.1.4</b>	<b>2.1.5</b>	<b>2.1.6</b>	<b>2.1.7</b>
<b>2.1.8</b>	<b>3.1.1</b>	<b>3.1.2</b>	<b>3.1.3</b>	<b>3.1.4</b>	<b>3.1.5</b>	<b>3.1.6</b>
<b>3.1.7</b>	<b>3.1.8</b>	<b>3.2.1</b>	<b>3.2.2</b>	<b>4.1.1</b>	<b>4.1.2</b>	<b>4.2.1</b>
<b>4.2.2</b>	<b>4.2.3</b>	<b>4.2.4</b>	<b>5.1.1</b>	<b>5.1.2</b>	<b>5.1.3</b>	<b>5.1.4</b>
<b>5.1.5</b>	<b>5.1.6</b>	<b>6.1.1</b>	<b>6.1.2</b>	<b>6.2.1</b>	<b>6.2.2</b>	

## Best Practice 1.1—The plans

Best Practice 1.1 evaluates community planning and how well a community’s redevelopment vision is integrated into a master plan, downtown/corridor plan and capital improvements plan. A master plan sets expectations for those involved in development, it gives the public a degree of certainty about their vision for the future and it is crucial for a community to establish and achieve its goals. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA), Public Act 33 of 2008, requires that the planning commission create and approve a master plan as a guide for development and subsequently review the master plan at least once every five years after adoption.

The “Portage Comprehensive Plan” was adopted in June of 2014. While the plan is meeting the RRC expectation that comprehensive plans be current within five years, the city should consider reaffirming the commitment to implementing this plan or begin the process of updating the plan in the near future.

The plan and community vision are the result of an extensive public engagement campaign that included a series of community input sessions, Planning Commission workshops, focus groups and an open house. The plan is organized into three primary topics: community plus quality of life; transportation; and land use and character. Each of these topic areas details a range of challenges and opportunities, establishes goals the city will strive to meet and provides a path to achieving each goal by listing objectives and implementation actions. The future land use section of the plan inventories existing land uses, explains desired future land uses and a zoning plan outlines how the desired future land uses relate to the city’s zoning regulations.

An implementation section summarizes the recommendations found throughout the plan into a checklist of actions with associated time frames and responsible parties. The responsibilities are delegated according to “action type”—meaning the responsibility falls upon those currently tasked with administering programs, land use regulations or capital improvements. Organizing implementation actions in this way is consistent with the RRC Best Practices.

The comprehensive plan describes the city’s vision of developing the City Centre area as a downtown district. While this vision is fully supported by the RRC team, it should be noted that the city does not have a Traditional Downtown according to MEDC criteria; and therefore the City Centre district’s recommendations are associated with Best Practice 1.1.3 (corridor plan) instead of 1.1.2 (downtown plan). The criteria and expectations of these best practices are the same.

The strategies for realizing the vision for the City Centre district are found in the City Centre sub-area plan within the comprehensive plan. The plan begins with an inventory of the downtown district’s assets, including: the Portage Library; two parks; a band shell; and numerous restaurants. The sub-area plan then details the vision for the City Centre district. The vision is for compact, mixed-used, pedestrian-oriented development that can be used by residents as a gathering place. The specific strategies the city will employ to make this happen include requiring rear-yard parking lots, focusing on traffic calming to enable safe pedestrian crossings, preserving the environment and developing a sense of place and aesthetic appeal through landscaping standards, building design standards, wayfinding, gateway signage, and pedestrian-scaled, shepherds-hook-styled lighting.

The City Centre subarea plan contains implementation actions in the form of specific projects, programs and policy amendments. To fully align with the RRC Best Practices the city should ensure all the projects in this plan are up-to-date and provide estimated costs and timeframes for completion for each of the projects. This will help the city coordinate City Centre projects with the capital improvements plan.

To comply with the MPEA and meet Best Practice 1.1.4, communities need to allocate funds for at least six years of capital improvements. Portage goes beyond the RRC Best Practice expectation by planning through the year 2028. The detailed plan outlines the yearly allocation of funds for each project. A pie chart illustrates what percentage of funding is allocated with which expenditure category, including streets, debt

## Best Practice 1.1—The plans *continued*

service, public safety, sidewalks and bikeways, parks and recreation, public facilities and utilities.

The city’s capital improvements plan does an excellent job of profiling each project and including a justification for the project—based on the consideration of each project’s benefits and impact on operating funds.

Portage’s coordinated capital improvements will facilitate communication internally (within city government) and externally (with applicants and investors) and it will enable the public infrastructure projects identified in the city’s comprehensive plan and downtown plan to be implemented pursuant to expected timelines.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
1.1.1	The governing body has adopted a master plan in the past five years.	✓	
1.1.2	The governing body has adopted a downtown plan.	N/A	
1.1.3	The governing body has adopted a corridor plan.	<input type="checkbox"/> Update City Centre projects and include estimated costs and time frames for completion	Q3 2019
1.1.4	The governing body has adopted a capital improvements plan.	✓	

## Best Practice 1.2—Public participation

Best Practice 1.2 assesses how well the community identifies and engages its stakeholders on a continual basis. Public participation aims to prevent or minimize disputes by creating a process for resolving issues before they become an obstacle.

Portage has consistently engaged residents in the past to inform the development of long-range plans. To inform the 2014 comprehensive plan, the city conducted a series of community input sessions, Planning Commission workshops, focus groups and an open house.

On a day-to-day basis the city goes far beyond meeting the public engagement practices required by law (i.e., advertising public hearings) as it utilizes an abundance of media platforms to communicate with and engage residents. The Portage Cable Access TV station broadcasts coverage of city council, planning commission and Zoning Board of Appeals meetings and original programming related to city departments, events and services. The city uses the municipal website to post legal notices, advertise events and city meetings, disseminate press releases and provide connections to the city’s social media accounts. Website visitors can also sign up for the city’s “Portager Newsletter,” which is a monthly

newsletter that is mailed to all residences and businesses within the city. The city takes an innovative approach to public engagement by allowing residents to report needed code enforcement or infrastructure maintenance tasks; and the “MI. Portage” mobile app directs users to city parks and provides notifications and emergency alerts. The city has a social media presence on Facebook, which allows the city to reach a broad audience in a quick, cost-effective manner.

The city’s abundant public engagement methods make it even more important that outreach is coordinated and the results are monitored and shared. The city currently prepares public participation strategies before major efforts, but there is not a documented, overarching public engagement strategy that integrates and coordinates all the efforts.

To meet the RRC Best Practice expectations the city should create a document that describes how various local and regional stakeholders will be reached in certain situations. The strategy should also explain how data, information and/or the results of engagement initiatives will be shared with the public. When completed, the city should post this document online.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
1.2.1	The community has a public participation plan for engaging a diverse set of community stakeholders.	<input type="checkbox"/> Create an overarching public participation strategy that defines outreach strategies and how the success of these strategies will be evaluated and shared	Q2 2019
1.2.2	The community demonstrates that public participation efforts go beyond the basic methods.	✓	
1.2.3	The community shares outcomes of public participation processes.	✓	

## Best Practice 2.1—Zoning regulations

Best Practice 2.1 evaluates the community's zoning ordinance and assesses how well it implements the goals of the master plan. Zoning is a crucial mechanism for achieving desired land use patterns and quality development. Foundationally, the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEA), Public Act 110 of 2006, requires that a zoning ordinance be based on a plan to help guide zoning decisions.

The city's comprehensive plan describes the desire for the City Centre area to become more compact, mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented. The city's zoning ordinance, specifically the City Centre area (CCA)—Mixed-use Floating District, is consistent with the city's goals for the City Centre district as it enables and to a certain extent ensures the type of desired development. The CCA zoning district ensures buildings are accessible by pedestrians by requiring a significant part of all proposed buildings to be located within 10 feet of the front property line, prohibiting parking in the front of buildings, allowing open store fronts and encouraging the installation of pedestrian amenities such as street trees, outdoor seating and public art.

The ordinance meets the RRC Best Practice criteria for housing as it permits one-, two- and multi-family dwelling units, work/live units, accessory dwelling units and upper-floor housing above non-residential uses. Permitting these various housing types provides residents housing and lifestyle options and allowing residents to live in the city center will help increase foot traffic, support downtown businesses and add to the vibrancy of the area.

Consistent with the RRC Best Practices, the city's zoning ordinance includes standards supportive of non-motorized transportation. Zoning provisions address bike parking, traffic calming, sidewalk connectivity and pedestrian-scale lighting. Further, the city's complete

streets ordinance requires new developments plan for bicycle and pedestrian connectivity.

Consistent with Best Practice 2.1.3, there is flexibility in the administration of the city's zoning code. Flexibility is provided through the existence of overlay zones, non-conforming use and building regulations. The code outlines a process for zoning map and text amendments (rezoning), and design standards ensure proposed buildings are consistent with the city's vision.

The city's listing of new-economy uses is also consistent with RRC Best Practice 2.1.3. By expressly permitting brewpubs, microbrewers, outdoor theaters, and research/design/product development buildings, the city is indicating that it would welcome many of the land uses currently in demand across the state.

The city meets the RRC Best Practices in regard to parking. The city allows for adjacent uses to share parking—and for parking to be reduced when the uses will have a high number of multipurpose trips or differing peak parking demands. In situations where the applicant can show that the required parking would be excessive, the planning commission can defer the construction of parking until a later date. Further, reductions can be approved by the planning commission when transit is available or the use is near multi-purpose trails. The ordinance also limits the amount of parking (25 percent more than the parking minimum) to mitigate against excessive parking.

The city aligns with the RRC Best Practices for green infrastructure. The city's code requires a street tree be planted for every 30 linear feet of property frontage; a provision enables the construction of on-site wind energy systems and electric vehicle charging stations; and the code encourages low-impact development such as rain gardens, bio-swales and pervious pavement.

## Best Practice 2.1—Zoning regulations *continued*

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
2.1.1	The governing body has adopted a zoning ordinance that aligns with the goals of the master plan.	✓	
2.1.2	The zoning ordinance provides for areas of concentrated development in appropriate locations and encourages the type and form of development desired.	✓	
2.1.3	The zoning ordinance includes flexible tools to encourage development and redevelopment.	✓	
2.1.4	The zoning ordinance allows for a variety of housing options.	✓	
2.1.5	The zoning ordinance includes standards to improve non-motorized transportation.	✓	
2.1.6	The zoning ordinance includes flexible parking standards.	✓	
2.1.7	The zoning ordinance includes standards for green infrastructure.	✓	
2.1.8	The zoning ordinance is user-friendly.	✓	

## Best Practice 3.1—Development review policy and procedures

Best Practice 3.1 evaluates a community's development review policies and procedures, project tracking and internal/external communications. An efficient, deliberate and fair site plan review process is integral to being redevelopment ready. When communities can provide certainty and minimize risk in project planning, developers will be more likely to bring jobs and investment to a community. Therefore, communities should look to simplify and clarify policies wherever possible.

The city's development review process is outlined in the zoning code. The process allows for low-impact development proposals to be reviewed administratively; while the planning commission has the authority to approve both permitted- and special-use site plans. Zoning map and text amendments require public hearings by both the planning commission and the city council before the city council makes a decision on the rezoning request. The code further outlines the responsibilities of the Zoning Board of Appeals—which is responsible for deciding on variance requests and zoning-related appeals. The RRC Best Practices call for permitted-use site plans to be approved administratively or via the planning commission. The city's review process is fully aligned with the RRC Best Practices.

The city's development review guide states a preliminary discussion with the city's development officer—while not required—is the first step in the development review process. These preliminary discussions enable prospective applicants to discuss requirements and generally discuss the viability of projects with city staff prior to incurring the costs associated with completing and full site plan application packet. Offering these pre-application meetings is consistent with the RRC Best Practices. These meetings allow developers to ensure the viability of their proposals, discuss ideas and identify potential project pitfalls before incurring the costs associated with submitting a full site plan application.

When potentially high-impact projects are proposed, the city works with applicants to engage the public and attempts to identify and address issues early in the process. This practice is consistent with the RRC Best

Practices, although it should be noted that a related recommendation is outlined in Best Practice 1.2, recommending the city list contact information for key community stakeholders to facilitate outreach efforts.

Portage's staff reviews site plan proposals internally prior to the proposal being approved administratively or by the planning commission. These reviews are coordinated by the community development department and include departmental reviews by the planning/zoning, public works, assessor, building, fire, historic district commission, economic development, transportation and utilities department, the city manager and representatives from Kalamazoo County.

The city's development guide outlines the steps involved in all of the city's development-related processes. The RRC Best Practices call for the creation of development review flowcharts for each different review process a community offers (e.g., site plan, special use, rezoning, variance). While the city does not have flowcharts, it does have a sequenced list of steps for each of the city's processes. General time frames are included within the development guide—setting expectations for applicants and meeting the best practice criteria. While not necessary for RRC certification, the city may want to illustrate the development review process steps in the form of flowcharts. Seeing the steps in the process in this style may be easier to understand for some prospective applicants.

The city's community development department and particularly the development review officer is tasked with the tracking of projects during the site plan review process and through the permitting and inspection phases of the development process. The city uses BS&A software to track projects.

Although the development review process is currently working well for Portage, it is still important that the city receive feedback on how the process is working from the applicants' perspective. This input is vital in helping the city identify ways the process can be improved to meet the needs of customers. The city currently does this in multiple ways. A customer service webpage describes the city's commitment to providing exceptional customer service and it enables residents to complete a customer

## Best Practice 3.1—Development review policy and procedures *continued*

service questionnaire and/or complete a form that allows for open-ended comments. Citizens can also complete comment cards—which exist in print form—in city hall. The city’s development review officer and permits

coordinator are tasked with consistently reviewing this feedback as it relates to the development review process and integrating changes where applicable.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
3.1.1	The zoning ordinance articulates a thorough site plan review process.	✓	
3.1.2	The community has a qualified intake professional.	✓	
3.1.3	The community defines and offers pre-application site plan review meetings for applicants.	✓	
3.1.4	The appropriate departments engage in joint site plan reviews.	✓	
3.1.5	The community has a clearly documented internal staff review policy.	✓	
3.1.6	The community promptly acts on development requests.	✓	
3.1.7	The community has a method to track development projects.	✓	
3.1.8	The community annually reviews the successes and challenges with the site plan review and approval procedures.	✓	

## Best Practice 3.2—Guide to Development

Best Practice 3.2 evaluates the availability of a community’s development information. Having all development-related information in a single location can greatly increase the ability of a developer or resident to access what they need efficiently. Including this information online can also maximize Portage’s capacity as staff will spend less time answering questions when applicants can have these questions answered by the city website.

The community development department webpage serves as a clearinghouse for a range of development-related documents and meets nearly all of the RRC Best Practice criteria for Best Practice 3.2. This webpage provides a fee schedule for development-related services, and the guide to development includes the step-by-step process guide with estimated time frames and a

commercial development application that serves as the city’s site plan application among other development proposals. Portage’s array of long-range plans are also available from this webpage, including: the “2014 Comprehensive Plan,” “Lake Center Market Strategy,” “2018–2028 Capital Improvements Plan,” “2013 Major Thoroughfare Plan,” “CDBG Consolidated Plan” and the city’s “Complete Streets Policy.”

A menu bar along the left side takes website visitors to the city’s capital improvements plan, city maps, and a list of incentives the city offers, including: the industrial tax abatement incentive, brownfield redevelopment incentive and benefits offered through the DDA, LDFA. The city meets all of the expectations of the RRC Best Practices.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
3.2.1	The community maintains an online guide to development that explains policies, procedures and steps to obtain approvals.	✓	
3.2.2	The community annually reviews the fee schedule.	✓	

## Best Practice 4.1—Recruitment and orientation

Best Practice 4.1 evaluates how a community conducts recruitment and orientation for newly appointed and elected officials. Such officials sit on the numerous boards, commissions and committees that advise community leaders on key policy decisions. Ensuring the community is able to recruit the best candidates for these bodies and also have a system in place to get new members up to speed ensures predictability and accountability in the development process.

Portage meets many of the RRC Best Practice expectations for recruitment and orientation. A boards/commissions section of the website provides easy access to webpages for all of the city’s boards and commissions. Each webpage provides a meeting schedule, agendas and minutes, an overview of responsibilities, links to archived and live recordings meetings, a link to the city charter and a link to the city’s “Government Guide” that explains the order meetings are to be conducted, and outlines the applicable meeting laws. The webpage does a great job actively seeking volunteers to serve on the city’s various boards and commissions. From this site applicants can easily apply to be appointed to a board or commission through the online application.

One way the city could bolster the existing board/

commission information is to work with existing board and commission members to identify the skill sets that are most useful to each board/commission. This information will help prospective applicants better understand which board/commission may be the best fit. In turn, this will help the city recruit officials who are the most suited to a given board/commission seat. A sample application that includes desired skill sets for various boards/commissions can be found on the RRC online library of resources under Best Practice 4.1.

Just as an official’s understanding of expectations is important prior to them becoming an elected or appointed official, it is important after. Portage provides city officials with orientation packets at the beginning of their term. These packets include background information about the city, including: the city charter, comprehensive plan, zoning code and the roles and responsibilities of each specific board/commission. This is consistent with the RRC Best Practices. While not required for RRC certification, the city may want to consider bolstering the city’s orientation practices by having orientation meetings or initial trainings with city department heads.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
4.1.1	The community sets expectations for board and commission positions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Outline desired skill sets for each of the city’s boards/commissions	Q2 2019
4.1.2	The community provides orientation packets to all appointed and elected members of development-related boards and commissions.	✓	

## Best Practice 4.2—Education and training

Best Practice 4.2 assesses how a community encourages training and tracks educational activities for officials and staff. Trainings provide officials and staff with an opportunity to expand their knowledge and ultimately make more informed decisions about land use and redevelopment issues. The advent of online training platforms makes educational opportunities more accessible than in the past and these opportunities should be taken advantage of.

Portage is well positioned to take advantage of training opportunities as money is allocated for this purpose in the city budget. Training plans for staff and development-related boards are developed annually — allowing staff and officials to set training goals and make progress toward achieving these goals.

In addition to outside training opportunities, the city conducts a variety of in-house trainings. The city’s knowledgeable staff are able to train board members

in their areas of expertise. Staff provides at least two trainings for city officials a year. Recently, in October 2018, staff put on a training about the city’s capital improvements program. Portage also does a good job of holding joint meetings and collaborative work sessions to communicate about and coordinate on existing proposals and policy.

The city also facilitates communication through the planning commission work program, which is sometimes referred to as the report of planning activities. On an annual basis, staff work with the planning commission to compile a report of reviewed/approved development proposals, policy changes and other initiatives. The annual work program document also describes the planning commission’s work for the upcoming year. This is consistent with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act and the RRC Best Practices.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
4.2.1	The community has a dedicated source of funding for training.	✓	
4.2.2	The community identifies training needs and tracks attendance of the governing body, boards, commissions and staff.	✓	
4.2.3	The community encourages the governing body, boards, commissions and staff to attend trainings.	✓	
4.2.4	The community shares information between the governing body, boards, commissions and staff.	<input type="checkbox"/> Post the most recent planning commission work program document on the city website	Q2 2019

## Best Practice 5.1—Redevelopment Ready Sites®

Best Practice 5.1 assesses how a community identifies, visions for and markets their priority redevelopment sites. Communities must think strategically about the redevelopment of properties and investments. Prioritized redevelopment should be targeted in areas that will catalyze further development around it. Instead of waiting for developers to propose projects, Redevelopment Ready Communities® identify priority sites and prepare information to assist developers in finding opportunities that match the community's vision.

Portage currently markets redevelopment opportunities within the city in a variety of ways. The city markets properties for sale or lease through the Southwest Michigan First website. The city's economic development webpage also provides a link to a city parcel viewer through which a property's ownership, construction information, sale history, land information and assessed value can be found. The economic development page also provides a list of city incentives offered, including: industrial tax abatement, BRA, DDA, LDA, border county incentives, and the webpage highlights the development flexibility provided offered through the city's mixed use zoning options. In partnership with Southwest Michigan First, The economic development page links to the website of the city's economic development partner—Southwest Michigan First. This website provides demographic, socioeconomic, workforce and transportation information which can be used to attract business investment to Portage.

Best Practice 5.1 calls for identifying, visioning for, and marketing redevelopment sites. Despite the identification of sites, the compilation of information and the listing of available incentives, the city is not fully meeting the expectations of RRC Best Practice 5.1. To meet the RRC Best Practices, Portage should work with community

stakeholders to identify, prioritize and generate visions for at least three redevelopment sites within the city. The visions for these sites should be tied to the comprehensive plan and the city should ensure a policy framework is in place to support each vision (i.e., zoning ordinance will allow the visions to be implemented). If the envisioned development would require a policy change or zoning amendment, the city should proactively make these changes to facilitate development.

After sites are identified and the visions are established, the city should gather information about the sites, including an image of the site, owner contact, a city contact person, address, size of the site, available infrastructure, asking price and an explanation of why the site is a great opportunity for an investor. The information should then be marketed online. Each site should be promoted along with the city logo and be consistent with the city's branding and marketing strategy.

One of the priority sites should be marketed in the form of a more thorough property information package (PIP). A PIP is a marketing document consisting of basic site information and a development vision, as well as more technical items (as applicable) that the city has available, including: traffic studies, environmental reports, marketing analyses, a property survey, natural features map, etc. The city should be sure to list all of the applicable incentives for each redevelopment site.

The marketing of priority redevelopment sites will help generate interest and excitement for the sites; and it will ensure Portage is ready for developer inquiries regarding the redevelopment of city sites. Priority sites and the PIP can be either new development or redevelopment, publicly owned or privately owned, although it is recommended the projects be located in areas that can stimulate other nearby development.

## Best Practice 5.1—Redevelopment Ready Sites® *continued*

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
5.1.1	The community identifies redevelopment sites.	<input type="checkbox"/> Prioritize at least three development/redevelopment sites within the city	Q1 2020
5.1.2	The community gathers basic information for redevelopment sites.	<input type="checkbox"/> Gather basic information on at least three priority redevelopment sites	Q1 2020
5.1.3	The community has developed a vision for each redevelopment site.	<input type="checkbox"/> Establish visions for at least three redevelopment sites	Q1 2020
5.1.4	The community identifies potential resources and incentives for prioritized redevelopment sites.	<input type="checkbox"/> Include potential resources and/or specific incentives with the identified redevelopment sites	Q1 2020
5.1.5	A property information package for a prioritized redevelopment site(s) is assembled.	<input type="checkbox"/> Create a property information package (PIP) for at least one of the redevelopment sites	Q1 2020
5.1.6	At least three redevelopment sites are actively marketed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Market the redevelopment sites on the city website	Q1 2020

## Best Practice 6.1—Economic development strategy

Best Practice 6.1 evaluates goals and actions identified by a community to assist in strengthening its overall economic health. Today, economic development means more than business retention, expansion and attraction. While business development is a core value, a community needs to include place making and talent in the overall equation for economic success. A successful economic development strategy will highlight a community’s assets and describe a range of innovative incentives that will attract both people and businesses.

Portage is proactive in planning for the economy as evidenced by the existence of the Portage DDA, BRA and LDFA. The city’s economic vision is outlined in the city’s comprehensive plan and in the “2025 Portage Visioning Project” which was adopted in 2007. The comprehensive plan focuses on quality of life elements to retain and attract businesses and a skilled workforce. The strategies to accomplish this include: placemaking, public art, fresh and local food and developing a culture of education. Further, the plan identifies motorized and non-motorized transportation networks as key to building high quality of life.

The “2025 Portage Visioning Project” also identifies economic development strategies. This project

established a vision for the community that reads, “Portage will be a dynamic, entrepreneurial and opportunity-rich community that proactively and adaptively supports responsible economic development.” The goals and objectives that will combine to make this vision a reality include nurturing the city’s small-town feel, facilitating access to cultural and recreational amenities, providing ubiquitous high-tech infrastructure, growing the City Centre and leading through intergovernmental cooperation.

To meet the RRC Best Practice expectations, the city will need to update and build on the existing economic development initiatives and integrate them into a cohesive, overarching strategy. This economic development strategy should include an analysis of the city’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis). The city should also specify implementation actions and specific time frames for the completion of each action. The city should certainly leverage the existing partnership with Southwest Michigan First and coordinate with their economic development strategy. Once the strategy has been created, the city should have a plan in place to review it on at least an annual basis.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
6.1.1	The community has approved an economic development strategy.	<input type="checkbox"/> Adopt an overarching economic development strategy	Q2 2020
6.1.2	The community annually reviews the economic development strategy.	<input type="checkbox"/> Annually review the adopted economic development strategy	Q4 2020

## Best Practice 6.2—Marketing and promotion

Best Practice 6.2 evaluates how a community promotes and markets itself. Marketing and branding are essential tools for promoting a community’s assets and unique attributes. Consumers and investors are attracted to places that evoke positive feelings and to communities that take pride in their town and their history.

Portage uses a multi-faceted approach to marketing. The city uses the Portage public access television station to publicize city events, broadcast public meetings, and disseminate public service announcements. Facebook is used to share notable achievements, advertise events and share news. A city app enables users to conveniently find city parks and other key city locations. The “Portager Newsletter” also allows the city to market its services, programs and initiatives.

The city website is used to share information on local businesses and market the city as a place with opportunities and a “A Natural Place to Move.” This slogan is connected with an attractive logo symbolizing the city’s natural beauty and recreational opportunities.

The city website also provides information on city businesses and other city assets which are marketed to website users.

The city has many key elements of a successful marketing and branding campaign in place. To fully align with the RRC Best Practices, the city should craft an overarching document that summarizes the city’s existing and planned marketing strategies. This overarching document will ensure the city’s efforts are coordinated and maximize efficiency and effectiveness. This document can have the general public as an audience, but it should be a “behind the scenes” description of how the

city’s leadership and staff work collaboratively to tell the city’s story in a consistent manner. The strategy should integrate the initiatives of the Portage DDA, EDC, TIFA and BRA and all of the city’s other local and regional partners. The strategy should also describe the ways the city plans to support and market the city’s priority redevelopment sites (detailed in Best Practice 5).

The second element of this best practice is the promotion of the community through a website. A municipal website serves multiple functions. On a fundamental level, it is a means to share information—including information about public meetings, city plans, policies, events and related organizations. Beyond this, a municipal website is an important expression of a community’s character and image. People who are unfamiliar with a community will often first look to a website for information. They will be forming their first impressions and reaching conclusions from the website; therefore it is imperative that the website is visually appealing and key information is easily accessible.

Portage’s city website is user-friendly, welcoming and aesthetically pleasing. The city’s brand (logo and slogan) are used consistently and a series of short videos with buzz words greet website visitors on the website’s landing page. From there, dropdown menus are accessed via organized the tabs: residents; visitors; business; government; connect; and I want to.... There is also a search bar that allows users to quickly find the information they are seeking. As the city completes the tasks outlined in this report, the applicable documents should be added to the website.

Status	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification	Estimated timeline
6.2.1	The community has developed a marketing strategy.	<input type="checkbox"/> Create an overarching marketing strategy document that integrates priority redevelopment sites	Q1 2020
6.2.2	The community has an updated, user-friendly municipal website.	<input type="checkbox"/> As they are completed, add missing items to the city website	Q1 2020

The RRC program assists communities in maximizing their economic potential by embracing effective redevelopment tools and best practices. As this report makes clear, there are a variety of ways the city can improve its development-related practices. Upon receipt of this report, city staff and leadership should review the recommendations and determine if they align with the city's priorities and vision. If, after review, the city believes RRC is still a good fit, the city council should pass a resolution of intent to continue with the process. Upon receipt of that resolution, the city will enter the final phase of the process: officially working toward certification. During that phase, the city will be able to make progress toward RRC items at its own pace and receive regular support from the RRC team. The

estimated timelines included in this report's tables can be adjusted by the city, based on staff time and resources.

Portage's strengths currently lie in detailed long-range plans, predictable zoning regulations and a streamlined development review process. Challenges of the city include visioning for priority redevelopment sites and creating overarching marketing and economic development strategies. With this report, resources provided through the RRC program and input from the city's involved residents and stakeholders, Portage will be able to complete all of the unmet RRC Best Practices and achieve certification. The RRC team views this report as the first step in a productive, long-lasting relationship that will continue for years to come.