



MPPS Policy Brief

Michigan local governments' planning and zoning on energy policy

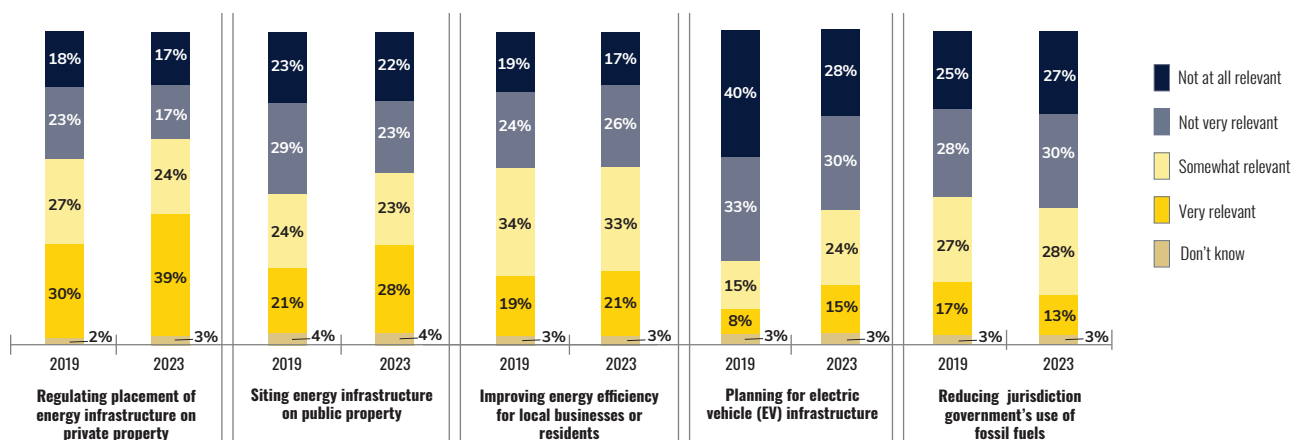
By Debra Horner and Natalie Fitzpatrick

In fall 2023, the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) asked local officials statewide about a range of topics regarding local energy issues, with several of the topics repeating questions asked on a fall 2019 survey. This brief looks at responses to questions asking local leaders whether energy issues are relevant to their local government, whether their jurisdiction has energy policies or renewable energy goals, and about the tone of local discussions about planning and zoning for energy.

A majority of Michigan local officials say regulating placement of energy infrastructure on private property (63%) and siting energy infrastructure on public property (51%) are somewhat or very relevant to their jurisdiction, significantly increased over those who said the same in 2019 (see *Figure 1*). A majority (54%) also say improving energy efficiency for local businesses or residents is somewhat or very relevant, essentially unchanged since 2019. Additionally, 39% of officials say planning for electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure is somewhat or very relevant, a jump from the 23% who said the same in 2019. Meanwhile, fewer local officials (41%) believe reducing their jurisdiction government's use of fossil fuels is relevant to their government in 2023, compared with 44% who said so four years prior.

Between 2019 and 2023, the primary changes were in the extent to which issues are relevant, rather than energy issues becoming relevant in more jurisdictions. Across all five energy issues, 9% statewide say none of these issues are at all relevant to their jurisdiction, essentially unchanged from 10% in 2019.

Figure 1
Local officials' assessments of the relevance of various energy issues to their jurisdiction's government, 2019 vs. 2023

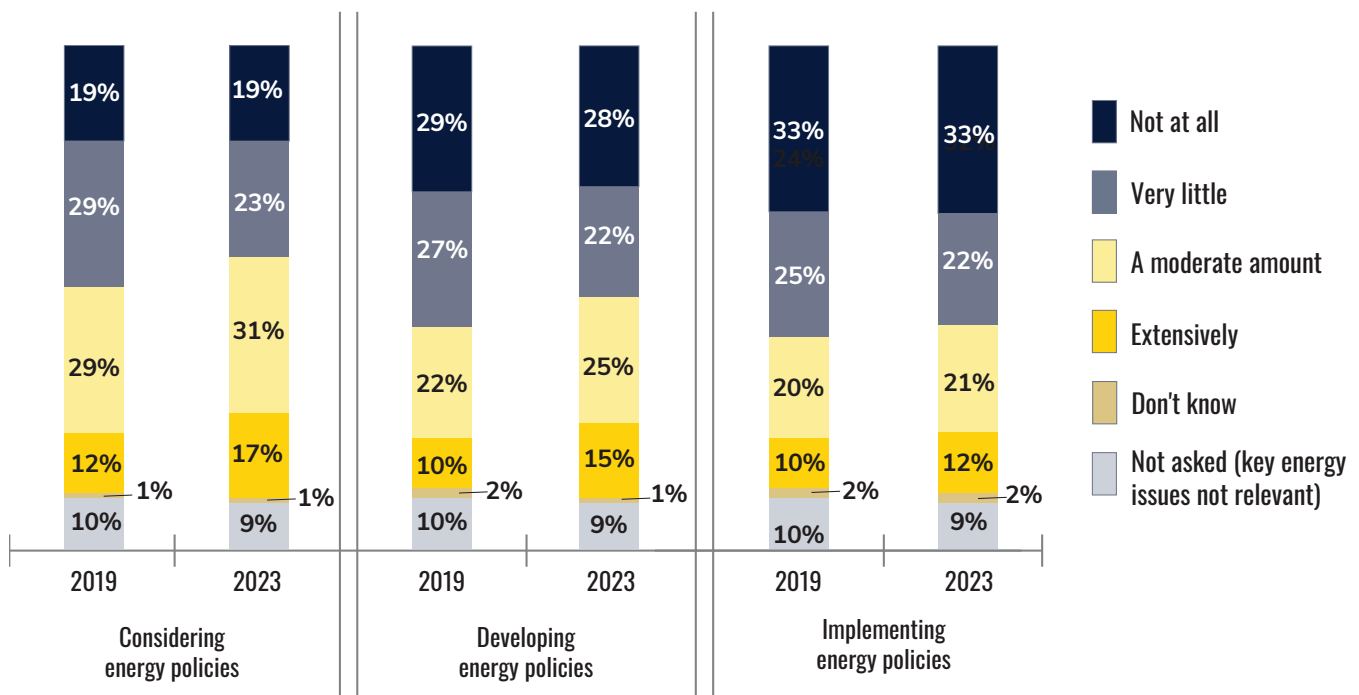


Michigan local governments are ramping up development and implementation of energy policies

As shown in *Figure 2*, 71% of Michigan jurisdictions reported in 2023 having at least *considered* various plans or policies regarding any energy issues at all, including 31% who have considered them a moderate amount and 17% who have considered them extensively. Meanwhile, 62% report that they are developing energy policies, and 55% report implementing them.

Over the past four years, the percentage of jurisdictions that are considering, developing, and/or implementing local energy policies either extensively or a moderate amount have increased, while the percentage that are not addressing energy at all has remained essentially unchanged.

Figure 2
Percent of jurisdictions that report considering, developing, and/or implementing any plans and/or policies regarding energy issues, 2019 vs. 2023



Note: breakdowns of the data in this brief by various jurisdiction characteristics such as community population size, region, and jurisdiction type, are available at <http://mpps.umich.edu>.

Nearly a quarter of jurisdictions statewide, including over half of the largest local governments, have or are considering renewable energy goals

In 2023, 24% of Michigan local governments reported that they currently have (9%) or are considering (15%) renewable energy goals or requirements to offset energy use by either the jurisdiction’s government or their community at large, a significant increase over the 11% that said the same in 2019 (see *Figure 3a*). The significant increase in number of jurisdictions *considering* such goals or requirements suggests that they may be much more widespread in the near future.

Over half (53%) of the state’s local governments in communities with over 30,000 residents currently have or are considering renewable energy goals or requirements to offset their government’s energy use, while 31% of those largest jurisdictions have or are considering goals to offset community energy use (see *Figure 3b*).

Among those Michigan jurisdictions that have set or are considering renewable energy goals, 77% of local officials are confident in their jurisdiction’s ability to meet its energy goals for energy use by the local government and 67% are confident they can meet their goals for community energy use.

When it comes to changes in State policy that would help local jurisdictions meet their energy goals, local leaders cite upgrades to the electric grid infrastructure that serves the community (49%), allowing community solar projects or installations (27%), changes to state building codes designed to reduce energy use or decarbonize (19%), support for independent microgrids (18%), and changes to net metering laws (14%).

Figure 3a
Percent of jurisdictions with any renewable energy goals or requirements to offset government’s or community’s energy use, 2019 vs. 2023

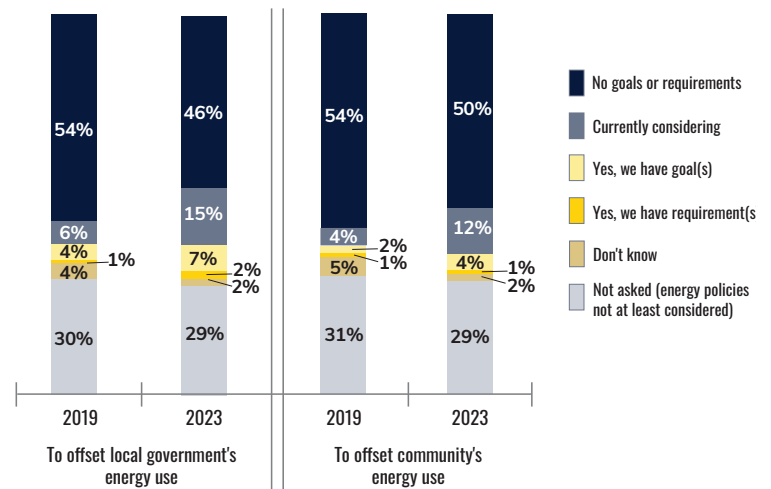
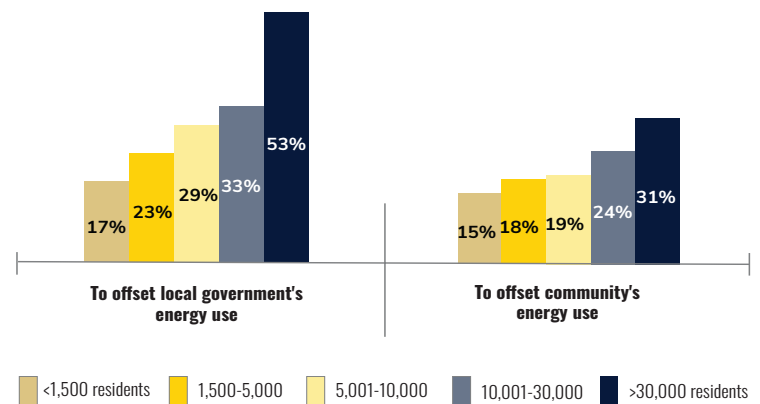


Figure 3b
Percent of jurisdictions that have or are considering any renewable energy goals or requirements to offset government’s or community’s energy use, 2023, by population size

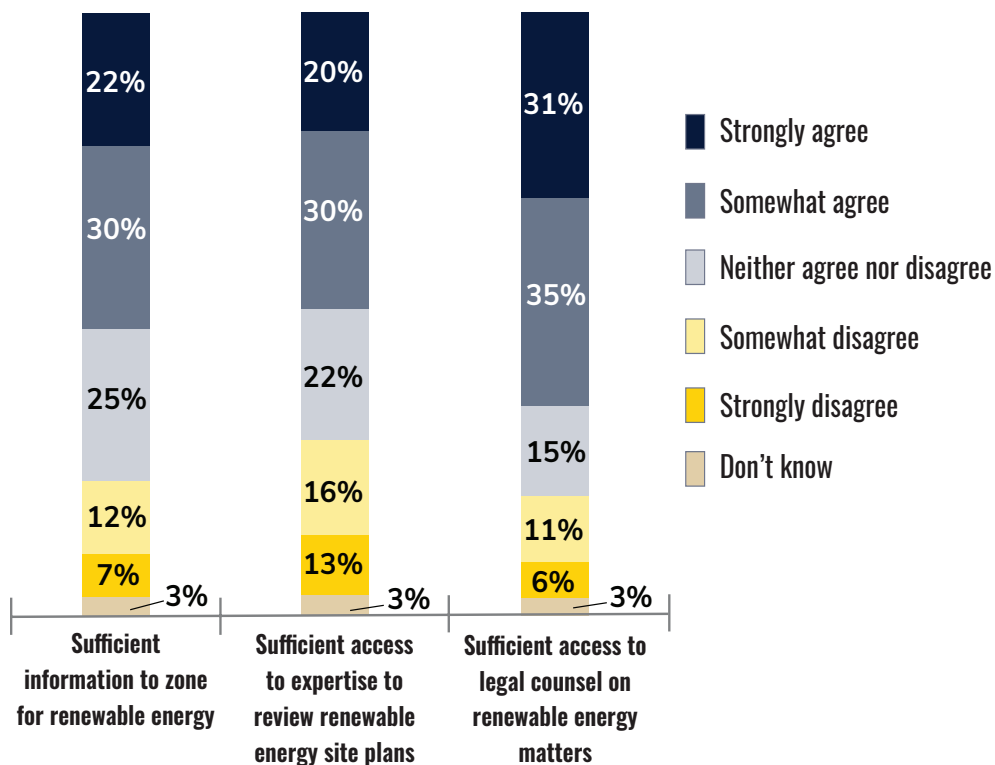


In communities that plan or zone for renewable energy, most feel they have sufficient information and expertise

According to the [Michigan Zoning Database](#), as of March 2023, approximately 72% of Michigan cities, villages, and townships have local zoning authority, 13% rely on the county government for zoning, 8% are currently unzoned, and 7% are other or unknown.

As shown in *Figure 4*, a majority of local leaders from jurisdictions that are responsible for their own planning and/or zoning say they currently have sufficient information to zone for renewable energy (52% agree), sufficient access to expertise to review renewable energy site plans (50% agree), and sufficient access to legal counsel on renewable energy siting matters (66% agree). However, nearly a quarter do not have enough expertise for reviewing renewable energy plans, and many don't have enough information (19%) or access to legal counsel on renewables (17%).

Figure 4
Assessments of jurisdiction's ability to zone for renewable energy (among those that plan and/or zone and also have considered energy issues), 2023



Resources that Michigan local governments say would be *very* useful for their planning and/or zoning on energy issues include additional funds or grants (53%), access to technical experts on the local impacts of energy such as on wildlife, property values, etc. (52%), training for jurisdiction staff or officials (49%), access to customized technical assistance to review of draft ordinances or participate in planning commission meetings (47%), and templates for Master Plan language, sample public engagement surveys, etc. (47%). Only 6% of local leaders in communities that plan or zone for themselves say none of these resources would be helpful at all.

Local tone of policy discussions around renewable planning and zoning generally seen as constructive

Finally, although there have been examples of local controversies over renewable energy zoning in Michigan in recent years, most local leaders report that the tone of discussion on these issues within their community has generally been constructive. Statewide, in places that currently conduct their own planning and zoning, 79% say the tone of discussion among elected officials themselves on renewable energy zoning has been either somewhat or very constructive (see *Figure 5a*). Meanwhile, 15% report elected officials' discussions about renewable energy zoning have been somewhat or very divisive. Assessments of discussions between elected officials and jurisdiction residents on renewable energy zoning are slightly less positive, but still, 48% say those conversations tend to be constructive.

Nearly half (46%) of county officials say the tone of discussion between elected officials and residents in their county has been somewhat or very divisive (see *Figure 5b*). By contrast, over half (54%) of township officials say the tone of discussion with their residents has been generally constructive. City and village officials are most likely to say there is not local discussion about renewable energy zoning.

Figure 5a
Assessments of tone of discussions about renewable energy zoning in community (among those that plan and/or zone and also have considered energy issues), 2023

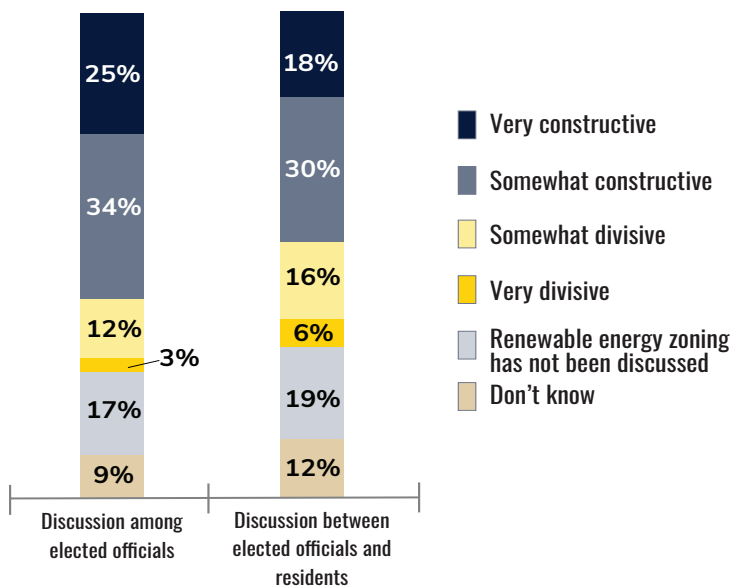
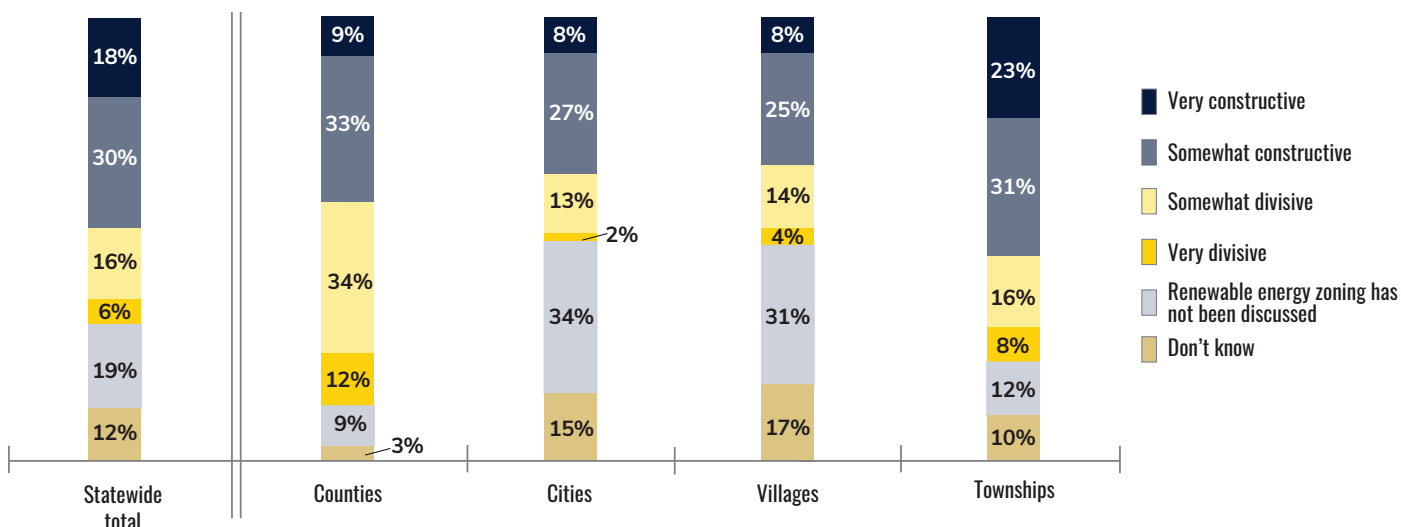


Figure 5b
Assessments of tone of discussions between elected officials and residents about renewable energy zoning in community (among those that plan and/or zone and also have considered energy issues), 2023, by jurisdiction type





Survey Background and Methodology

The data presented in this policy brief come from the Fall 2023 Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS). The MPPS is an ongoing census survey of all 1,856 general purpose local governments in Michigan conducted since 2009 by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan's Gerald R Ford School of Public Policy. The program is a partnership with Michigan's local government associations. The Fall 2023 wave was conducted October 2 – December 7, 2023. Respondents include county administrators, board chairs, and clerks; city mayors, managers, and clerks; village presidents, managers, and clerks; and township supervisors, managers, and clerks from 1,315 jurisdictions across the state, resulting in a 70% response rate by unit. More information is available at <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/mpps-2023-fall>.

See CLOSUP's website for the full question text on the survey questionnaire. Detailed tables of the data in this report, including breakdowns by various jurisdiction characteristics such as community population size, region, and jurisdiction type are available at <http://mpps.umich.edu>.

The survey responses presented here are those of local Michigan officials, while further analysis represents the views of the authors. Neither necessarily reflects the views of the University of Michigan, or of other partners in the MPPS.

Acknowledgement and Disclaimer

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