

New Law Requires Training for Local Planning Officials

A new law enacted September 2006 requires training for local planning officials. The law, which took effect January 1, 2007, requires that municipal planning and zoning officials, including county planning board members, receive a minimum of four hours of training each year.

The law allows municipalities to have wide latitude in the training opportunities they may authorize members to receive. Training opportunities could include courses offered by a municipality, a regional or county planning office including the Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council Spring and Fall Local Government Workshop, a state agency such as the Department of State, a state association like the Association of Towns, Conference of Mayors, or NY Planning Federation, or even a college or similar entity. Training formats available are also flexible and can include traditional classroom training, video and distance learning, or even self-study.

Training received in excess of four hours in any one year may be carried over into another year, at the discretion of the municipality. Board members failing to receive training required by their municipality are ineligible for reappointment to their board, unless exempted by their governing board.

“There are numerous free opportunities for training throughout the state,” said David Zorn, Executive Director of the Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council. He said that the Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council sponsors training at least twice each year at the Spring and Fall Local Government Workshop.

The new requirement recognizes the actions of municipal planning and zoning officials have a profound effect on state and land use policies and individual landowners. Well-considered and timely decisions by municipal boards attract quality community development, and result in fewer lawsuits and lower costs for municipal liability insurance.

The legislation has had a thorough review by the State Land Use Advisory Committee, which is comprised of state and local representatives and experts on municipal planning and zoning, environmental, housing, agricultural and economic development policies and practices. They cited a growing consensus among planning federations, local governments, builders, insurance companies, economic development corporations, land preservation trusts, environmental groups and others that well trained municipal planning and zoning board members are essential to maintaining and enhancing quality communities.