

Environmental Policies

Key References for Boards and Commissions

What you need to know...

This page serves as a policy primer for City Council and board members, offering a high-level overview of East Lansing's core environmental policies and ordinances. These frameworks shape municipal operations, development standards, and sustainability efforts, and are essential context for informed decision-making and oversight.

Soil Erosion & Sedimentation Control Ordinance

(Code Ch. 34, Art. I)

Any land disturbance that meets size or proximity triggers must secure a City SESC permit and follow an approved erosion-control plan. The rule safeguards surface waters, prevents drainage problems, and applies equally to municipal projects, private development, and residential improvement projects.

Green Building Policy

(Resolution 2009-01)

Any new municipal building over 5,000 sq ft must achieve at least LEED-NC Silver, and major renovations must incorporate green-building and low-impact-design practices wherever practical. Private projects that receive City financial incentives (e.g., TIF) must meet equivalent standards set in the development agreement. The policy ties public dollars to verifiable environmental performance without dictating a single certification path.

Coal-Tar Sealant Ban & Contractor Registration

(Code Ch. 14, Art. IV)

Coal-tar pavement sealants are barred city-wide because they shed carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) that wash into stormwater - or hitch a ride indoors on shoes - threatening the Red Cedar and Looking Glass River watersheds and public health alike. Any commercial applicator working in East Lansing must register with the City Clerk each year; unregistered work or illegal product use can trigger fines of up to \$500 per day.

Wetland Protection Ordinance

(Code Ch. 49)

East Lansing is one of Michigan's "opt-in" communities that regulates wetlands locally in addition to State law. Anyone proposing to fill, drain, or otherwise impact a regulated wetland must undergo City review, secure a local permit (often alongside the State permit), and present the project to both the Commission on the Environment and City Council. The "no-net-loss" standard means unavoidable impacts require mitigation, and early consultation with DPW can save costly redesigns.

Climate Sustainability Plan (2012)

The Plan is the umbrella roadmap for cutting greenhouse-gas emissions, conserving resources, and building resilience across five program areas: Waste Management, Energy Efficiency, Renewable Energy, Transportation, and Water Management. Every department is expected to check new projects, purchases, and operating procedures against these goals and to report progress in budget narratives and annual updates.

Recycling Amenities for Multifamily Housing

(Code § 36-86)

All new apartment and mixed-use buildings must include dedicated and accessible recycling containers sized to resident demand. Planning staff ensure space, truck access, and enclosure design are addressed upfront so tenants can recycle from day one.

Pollinator-Friendly Community Resolution (2016)

Council annually reaffirms a commitment to habitat for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. Staff encourage native plantings, reduced mowing, and minimal pesticide use in both public landscapes and private development proposals, reinforcing strong community support for ecological stewardship.

Post-Construction Stormwater Ordinance

(Code Ch. 34, Art. V)

New development and redevelopment must treat and detain stormwater so that runoff volume and quality are no worse than pre-development conditions. Low-impact design -rain gardens, porous pavement, green roofs - is strongly encouraged. Early coordination with DPW Engineering keeps projects on schedule and protects local waterways from flooding and pollutants.

Green Fleet Policy

(Resolution 2014-8)

Vehicle acquisitions are evaluated on total cost of ownership, not sticker price alone, and a bid that meets operational needs may cost up to 10 % more if it delivers demonstrably lower emissions or fuel use. Departments are encouraged to right-size fleets, seek grants for alt-fuel infrastructure, and phase in hybrids, EVs, CNG, or biodiesel units where feasible.

Procurement Policy for Purchase of Recycled Products

(Resolution 1990-2)

This policy directs staff to prioritize purchasing paper products with the highest recycled material percentage, allowing a 10% price preference.

Tree Protection Ordinance

(Code Ch. 48, Art. I)

Trees in street rights-of-way and parks are City assets overseen by DPW, and removing them without approval is strictly prohibited. On private property, a removal permit is required for most commercial or multifamily sites, while work on typical single-family lots is generally exempt. Unauthorized removals - on public or private trees - can trigger substantial fines and mandatory replacement. The ordinance safeguards East Lansing's tree canopy, directs species selection and planting standards, and protects the storm-water, shade, and habitat benefits that mature trees provide.

100% Clean Energy Resolution

(Resolution 2020-1)

Council has set a binding goal to source 100 % of municipal electricity from renewables by 2030 and to trim overall facility energy use 5 % every year. Capital plans, equipment replacements, and operating budgets are expected to favor efficiency first and then renewable generation or green-power purchasing to close the gap.

Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy

(Resolution 2017-2)

City buyers must choose products and services with lower life-cycle impacts when performance is equal and the price premium is no more than 10 %. Exemptions are allowed only for functionality, excessive cost, or health-and-safety emergencies. The policy embeds "green" criteria in every requisition and RFP, from copier paper to heavy equipment.

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