

The below is merely a simplified explanation of the process by which a village becomes a city in Michigan. The process is set forth by the State of Michigan. The Village of Sparta, or any other village for that matter, does not set the process. Instead, any village must follow all state guidelines and applicable laws.

Village to City Incorporation: Step-by-Step Summary

Step 1: Explore the Idea & Conduct Local Research & Outreach

Form a citizen task force or committee.
Hold meetings and gather community input.
Prepare a report with findings and a recommendation.
Use local staff, volunteers, and available public data to assess feasibility.
Consult neighboring communities or statewide organizations for insights and examples.
Evaluate financial impacts, tax structure, and long-term viability.

Step 2: Define the Boundaries

Obtain a certified boundary survey and legal description.
Work with the Office of Land Survey and Remonumentation (OLSR) for informal review.

Step 3: Draft and Review the Petition

Include the legal description, boundary map, and reasons for incorporation.
Seek experienced input before circulating the petition.

Step 4: Collect Signatures

Gather signatures from at least 100 or 5% of registered voters (whichever is greater).

Step 5: Submit to the State Boundary Commission (SBC)

Include signatures, affidavits, maps, cover letter, and all required materials.

Step 6: Clerks Notified and Questionnaire Responses Filed

Village, township, and county clerks are notified.
Responses to SBC questionnaires are due within 10 business days.
A public hearing is scheduled within 60–220 days.

Step 7: Legal Sufficiency Review & Public Hearing

SBC reviews petition, map, and all submissions for legal compliance.
SBC holds a public hearing at a location within the proposed city.
Petitioners present rationale; local governments and the public comment.

Step 8: SBC Recommendation to LARA

SBC recommends approval, denial, or boundary modification to the Director of LARA.

Step 9: LARA Issues Final Order and Referendum Window Begins

If approved, a 45-day window opens for petitioning a referendum on incorporation.

Step 10: Charter Commission Election

Charter Commissioners are elected from within the proposed city. There will be 9 members of the commission. If a referendum to challenge the process is filled, the charter commission would run at the same time as the referendum.

Step 11: Draft the City Charter

Charter Commission prepares draft charter within 90 days of the first meeting.
Reviewed by the Attorney General's office and the Governor.

Step 12: Charter Submitted to Voters

Charter is published and submitted to the electorate after approved by the State.
Initial City officials are elected concurrently.

If rejected, the charter may be revised and resubmitted. The highest vote getter for the initial mayor becomes the de facto mayor. The de facto mayor would reconvene the charter commission within 90 days to make revisions if the initial vote is unsuccessful.

Step 13: File the Charter with the State

Once approved, the charter is filed with the state and the city becomes official.

Step 14: Negotiate Division of Assets with Township

City and township negotiate division of shared assets, property, and obligations.

Step 15: Decide on Future Cooperation

The new City Council and voters determine whether to participate in new or continued joint ventures with the township (Fire Department, SRA, Cemeteries, Library, and Historical Commission).