



ISABELLA COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Prepared by:
Isabella County Planning Commission

With assistance from:
Isabella County Community Development Department

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Isabella County Planning Commission functions under and has their powers and duties set forth by both the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008) and the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006). The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA) provides for the creation, organization, powers and duties of Planning Commissions. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEA) provides for the adoption of zoning ordinances and the establishment of zoning districts and prescribes powers and duties of certain officials including the Planning Commission.

Section 19 of the MPEA (MCL 125.3819) requires the Isabella County Planning Commission to make an annual written report to the County Board of Commissioners. This report is to provide the Board with a summary and status of planning activities over the past year.

2.0 MEMBERSHIP

The MPEA states that the membership of the Planning Commission shall be representative of important segments of the community, such as the economic, governmental, educational, and social development of the local unit of government, in accordance with the major interests as they exist in the local unit of government, such as agriculture, natural resources, recreation, education, public health, government, transportation, industry, and commerce. The membership shall also be representative of the entire geography of the local unit of government to the extent practicable.

In 2019, the Planning Commission's membership was as follows:

Jeremy Murphy, Chairperson	Nathan Rogers
Kelly Bean, Vice-Chairperson*	Ann Silker
Tim O'Neil, Secretary	Jerry Neyer
Jim Horton, BOC Representative	Bob Campbell
Phillip Vogel	

** Member has obtained the Master Citizen Planner Certificate through MSU Extension.*

3.0 MEETINGS

At the January 10, 2019 organizational meeting, the Planning Commission set their meetings for the Second Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m. in Room 225 of the Isabella County Building. In 2019, the Commission met in every month with the exception of February and October. The Commission held three (3) special meetings in 2019 (January, August and September). In 2020, the Commission will continue to meet on the Second Thursday of the month. All meetings are held in compliance with the Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976).

- The Planning Commission held ten (10) regular meetings in 2019 and three (3) special meetings.

4.0 PLANNING COMMISSION RESPONSIBILITIES

The Planning Commission's basic duties and responsibilities include the following:

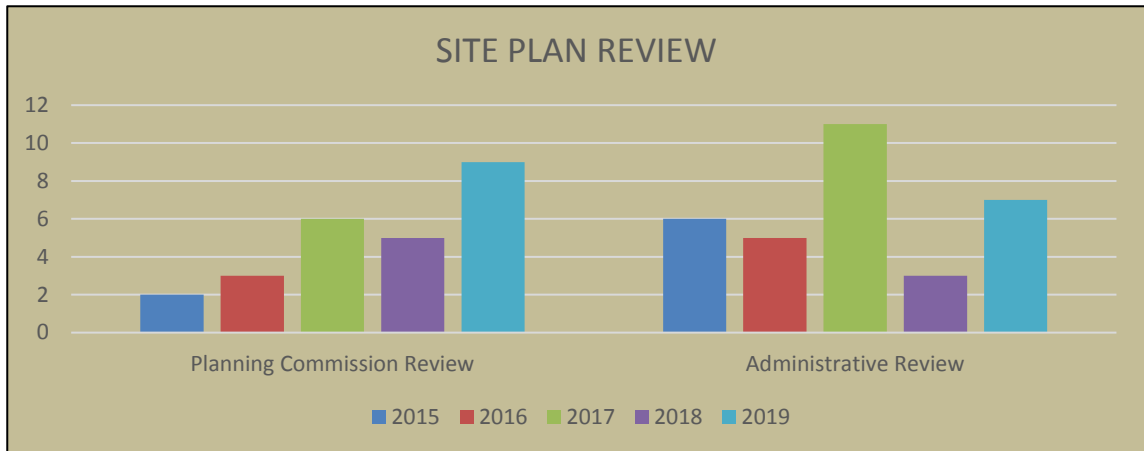
- Perform Site Plan Reviews as required in the Zoning Ordinance.
- Conduct public hearings on and make decisions on Special Use Permit requests as specified in the Zoning Ordinance.
- Conduct public hearings on and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners on Zoning Ordinance Text Amendments in accordance with the MZEA, Isabella County Zoning Ordinance and the Isabella County Master Plan.
- Conduct public hearings on and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners on rezoning requests (Zoning Map Amendments) in accordance with the MZEA, Isabella County Zoning Ordinance and the Isabella County Master Plan.
- Update and maintain the Isabella County Master Plan in accordance with the MPEA.
- Review and make recommendations, as required by the MZEA, on zoning amendments for any Township in the County that has their own zoning ordinance.
- Review and comment on any proposed Master Plans or Master Plan amendments for any community within or adjacent to Isabella County as required by the MPEA.
- The Planning Commission is also considered a reviewing agency for applications into the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program (PA 116).

5.0 PLANNING COMMISSION ACTIVITY IN 2019

The Planning Commission continued to be active this past year as they strived to meet their goals for the year. The Commission continuously reviewed the Zoning Ordinance and in doing so, recommended multiple changes to the ordinance and zoning map. This was done with careful consideration of the needs of the community and upholding the integrity of the County Master Plan. The Commission also continued active communication with the Townships. The following is a summary of all activity in 2019:

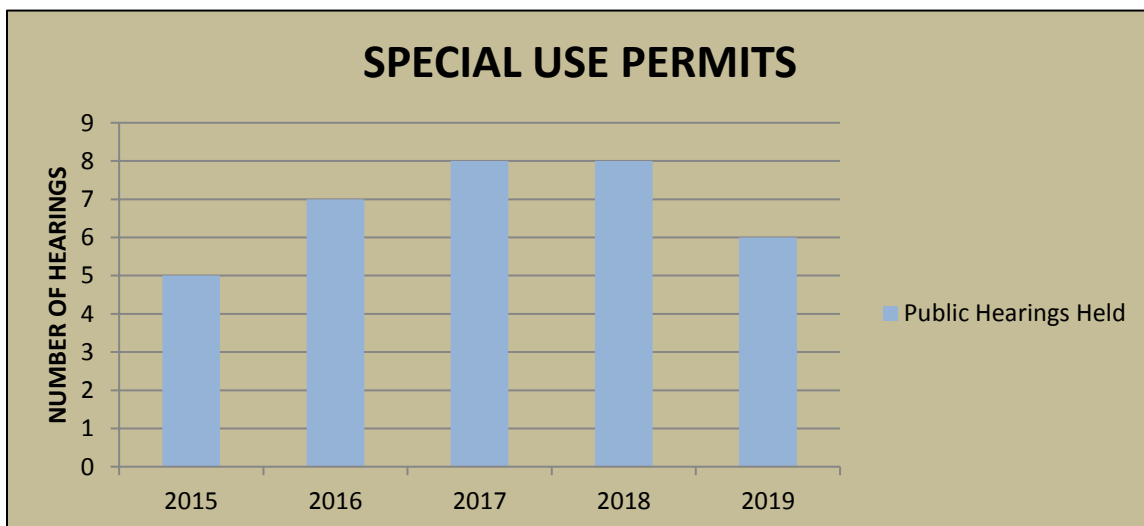
- 5.1 MASTER LAND USE PLAN REVIEW:** The Planning Commission in 2019 reviewed the Master Plan on several occasions during requests for action. A few areas have been identified for updating upon the next Plan update. According to the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, the Commission shall review the Plan at least every five years. Staff suggests a base line review of the master plan as the county moves towards the 2020 census.

5.2 SITE PLAN REVIEWS: In 2019 a total of sixteen (16) site plan reviews were performed. Nine (9) of which were conducted by the Planning Commission and seven (7) were conducted by staff. One of the site plan reviews included the review of all WECS (Turbines) in the Apex wind farm project. Those site plans were reviewed during two (2) special meetings in August and September of 2019. This was an increase from last year where eight (8) site plan reviews were performed.



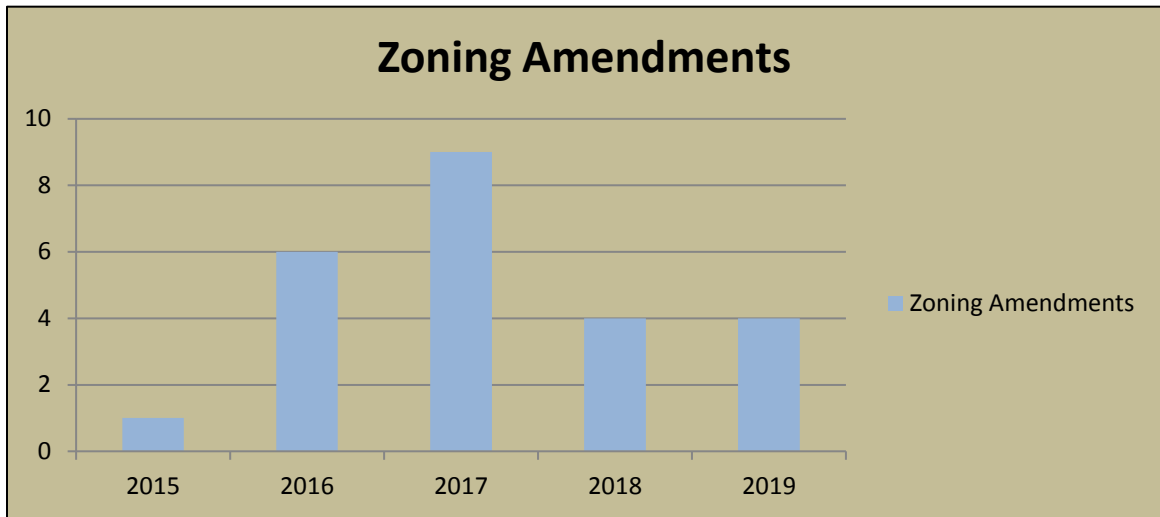
The Commission continues to see the benefit of reducing the number of applicants required to appear before the full Commission and expediting the permit process for those applicants.

5.3 SPECIAL USE PERMITS: In 2019 the Commission held six (6) public hearings for Special Land Use Permits. At a special meeting in January of 2019 the Commission held a public hearing off site at the Mount Pleasant City hall for purposes of hearing an application for a Wind Farm that was approved. The following is a comparison from 2015 – 2019:

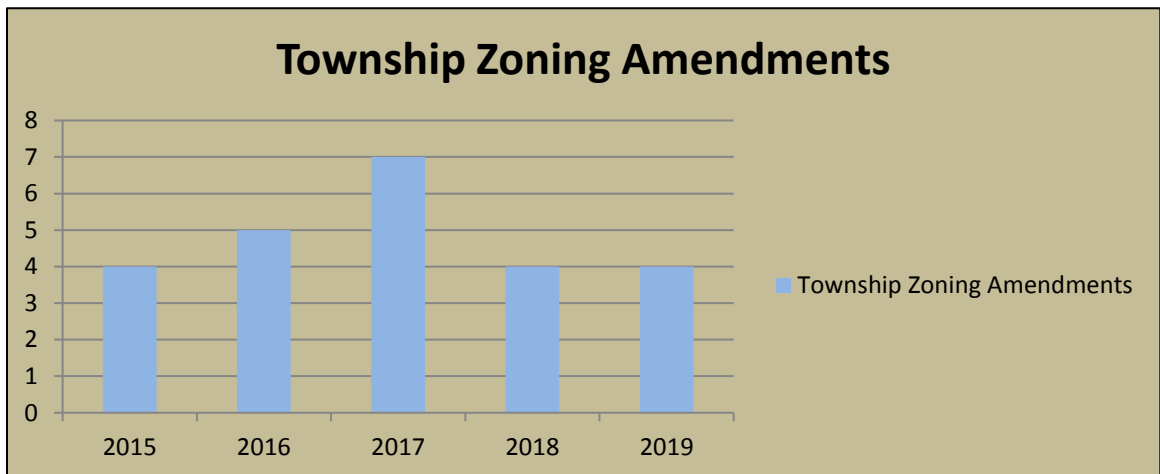


5.4 ZONING AMENDMENTS: In 2019 the Planning Commission held four (4) public hearings for Text and Map Amendments. The Planning Commission

reviewed and recommended three (3) of the four (4) requests for approval while one was recommended not to approve. All recommendations were sent to the County Board of Commissioners for final action. The following is a comparison from 2015 – 2019:



5.5 REVIEW OF TOWNSHIP ZONING AMENDMENTS: In 2019, the Commission reviewed and commented on four (4) zoning amendments. Union Township presented three (3) map amendments and one text amendment for review and comment. The following is a comparison from 2015 thru 2019:



5.6 MASTER PLAN REVIEWS: In January of 2019, the Commission was presented with an updated draft of the Lake Isabella Master Land Use Plan. In March 2019 Chippewa Township presented the Commission with a draft Master Plan for review and in December of 2019, the Commission received a letter of intent to update the Osceola County Master Plan.

5.7 FARMLAND AGREEMENT APPLICATIONS (PA 116): In 2019, the Commission reviewed and commented on a total of thirty-three (33) Farmland Agreement applications in seven (7) different Townships (Coe, Lincoln, Denver, Isabella, Sherman, Coldwater and Nottawa). The applications represented a total

of more than 2,024 acres entering the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program. This was a very large increase from last year when the Commission reviewed nine (9) applications totaling 525 acres.

6.0 ZONING PERMIT AND VIOLATION ACTIVITY IN 2019

Staff issued 292 Zoning Permits (108 for Turbines) in 2019 which is a huge increase of approximately 105% from 2018. Without the turbine permits, we still saw a large increase from 2018 from 142 permits in 2018 to 186 permits issued in 2019 (approximately a 31% increase). As noted previously, staff also conducted seven (7) site plan reviews as a result of Zoning Amendment #08-08. Staff has received more than 100 complaints throughout the County including activities in Coe Township in which staff provides administrative support to via an intergovernmental agreement.

7.0 ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS ACTIVITY IN 2019

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) heard requests from seven (7) applicants for seven (7) different variances in 2019. This was a slight decrease from 2018 where the Appeals Board heard nine (9) requests for Variance. The ZBA will review their actions early in 2019 and make any appropriate recommendations to the Planning Commission at that time.

8.0 TRAINING

No outside training was scheduled in 2019.

9.0 PLANNING COMMISSION GOALS FOR 2020

- Continue to review and maintain the County Master Plan.
 - *The Commission has reviewed the Plan on several occasions and will plan to conduct a baseline review of the master plan, including a review of Airport access plans that have been filed, in anticipation of the 2020 census.*
- Continue to review the Zoning Ordinance and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners on amendments to the Zoning Ordinance.
 - *The Commission reviewed and recommended several map and text amendments to the County Board of Commissioners. Recommended changes included wind energy conversion systems and map amendments in three separate townships in the county.*
- Maintain the open lines of communication between the Commission and the Townships. This was ranked as the most important goal of the Master Plan in the survey conducted with the 2007 update to the Master Plan. The Commission also believes that this is most important to best serve the people of Isabella County.
 - *Staff has visited several townships and/or communicated with several supervisors in an effort to maintain a high level of communication.*

- *The Commission has an agenda item for township concerns of which a few township representatives regularly are in attendance at the Commission meeting and often make comments.*