



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

ISABELLA COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

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 2023, the Planning Commission's membership was as follows:

Kelly Bean, Chairperson*
Tim O'Neil, Vice-Chairperson
Ann Silker, Secretary
Steve Swaney, BOC Representative
Phillip Vogel, ZBA Representative

Kyle Camp
Lisa Hoisington
Bob Campbell
Adam Brookens

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

3.0 MEETINGS

At the January 12, 2023 organizational meeting, the Planning Commission set their meetings for the second Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Isabella County Building. All Planning Commission meetings in 2023 were held in person. In 2023, the Commission met in every month with the exception of February, April, June, August, October, and November. All meetings are held in compliance with the Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976).

- The Planning Commission held six (6) regular meetings in 2023.

4.0 PLANNING COMMISSION RESPONSIBILITIES

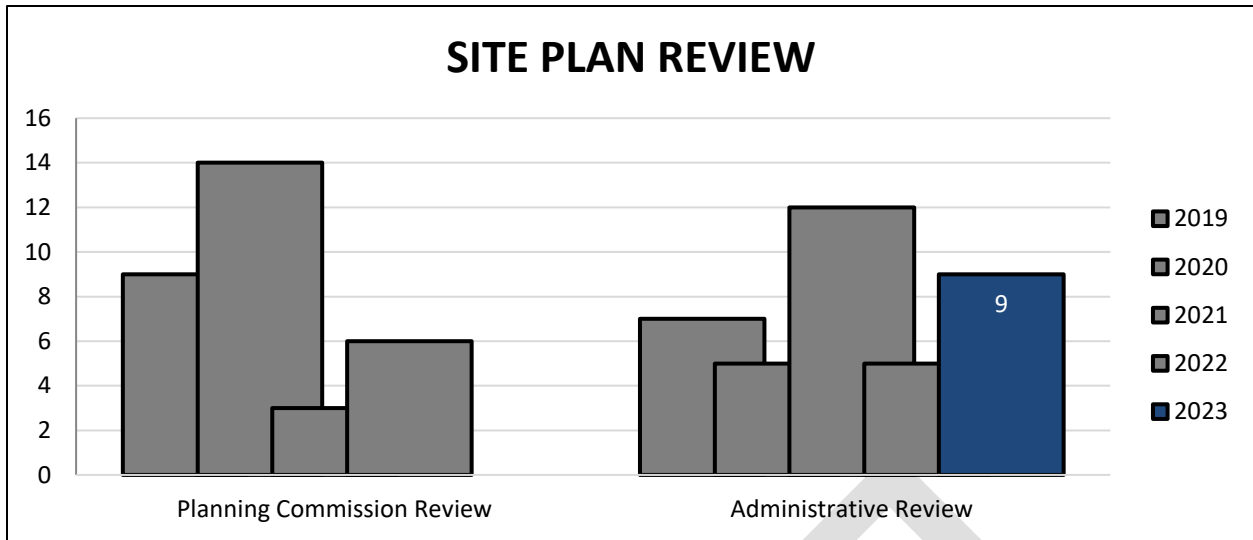
The Planning Commission's basic duties and responsibilities include the following:

- 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 2023

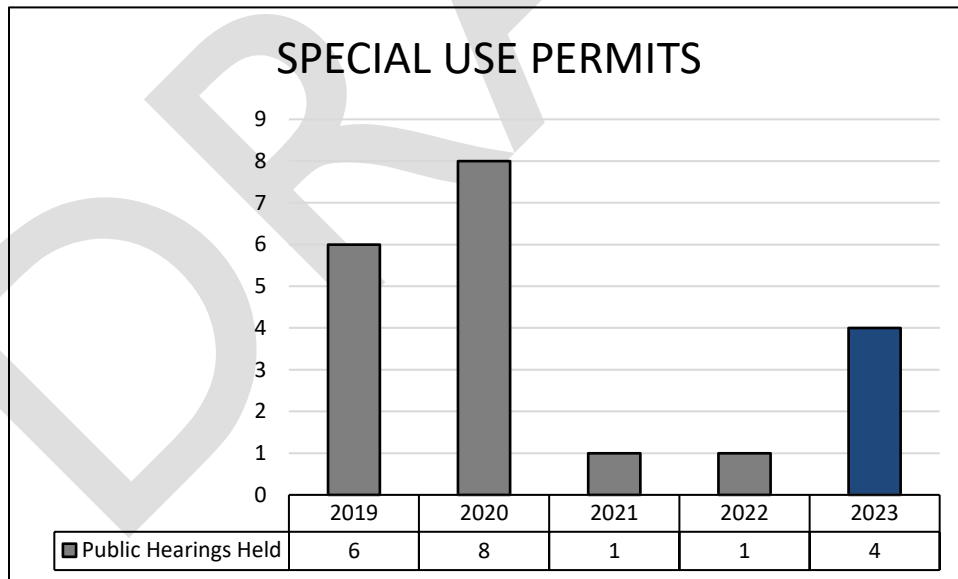
The Planning Commission continued to be active this past year holding in-person meetings. The Commission continuously reviewed the Zoning Ordinance and in doing so, recommended a few changes to the zoning map. This was done with careful consideration to the needs of the community and upholding the integrity of the County Master Plan. The Commission also continued remain active with communications to the Townships. The following is a summary of all activity in 2023:

- 5.1 Site Plan Reviews:** In 2023 a total of nine (9) site plan reviews were performed. All nine (9) site plan review applications were conducted by staff. Site plan reviews conducted by staff included expansions of commercial and industrial businesses. Overall, this was a decrease from 2022 where a total of eleven (11) site plan reviews were performed.

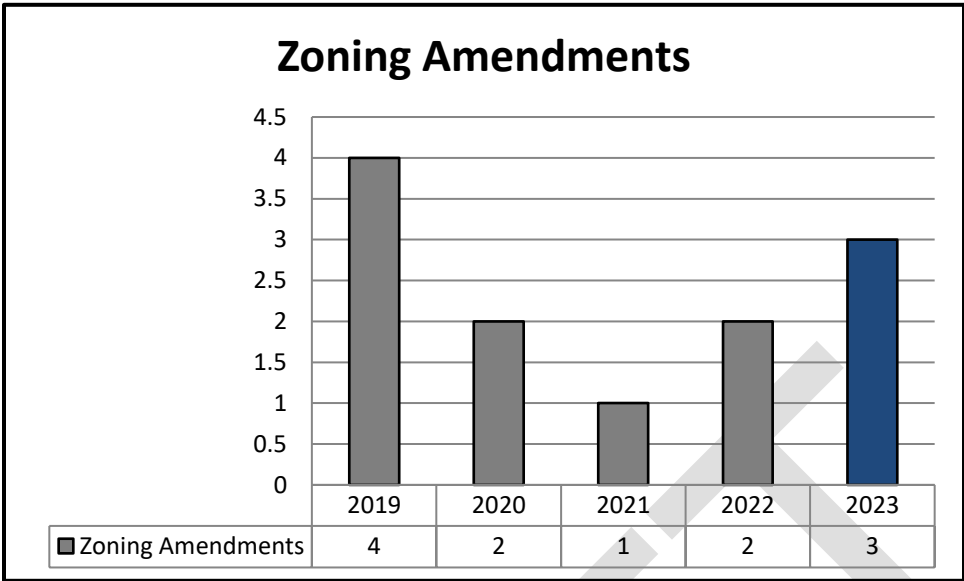


The Commission continues to see the benefit of reducing the overall number of applicants required to appear before the full Commission and expediting the permit process for those applicants.

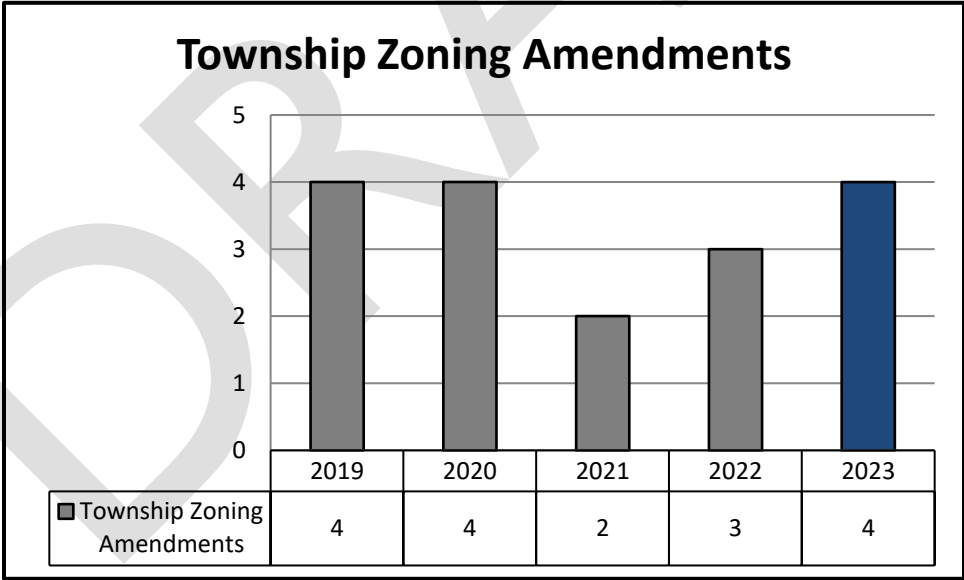
5.2 Special Use Permits: In 2023 the Commission held four (4) public hearings for Special Land Use Permits. This number also represents the average number of public hearings held each year since 2019 and is a greater number of public hearings than those held in 2021 and 2022. The following is a comparison from 2019 – 2023:



5.3 Zoning Amendments: In 2023 the Planning Commission held three (3) public hearings for Map Amendments. The Planning Commission reviewed and recommended the proposed amendments for approval. The recommendations were sent to the County Board of Commissioners for final action. The following is a comparison from 2019 – 2023:



5.4 Review of Township Zoning Amendments: In 2023, the Commission reviewed and commented on four (4) zoning amendments. Union Township presented one (1) text amendment, Coe Township presented two (2) text amendments and Chippewa Township presented one (1) map amendment. The following is a comparison of Township zoning amendments from 2019 thru 2023:



5.5 Master Plan Reviews: In 2023, the Commission was presented with two (2) letters of intent to amend the Master Land Use Plan for Coe Township in Isabella County and for Osceola County.

5.6 Farmland Agreement Applications (PA 116): In 2023, the Commission reviewed and commented on a total of twenty-one (21) Farmland Agreement applications in seven (7) different Townships (Chippewa, Coe,

Coldwater, Fremont, Lincoln, Rolland and Sherman). The applications represented a total of more than 1,534 acres entering the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program. This represents a 138% increase in acreage from 2022 when the Commission reviewed seventeen (17) applications totaling 643 acres.

5.7 Additional Activities

In addition to the previously noted activities, the Isabella County Planning Commission reviewed the Parks and Recreation Master Plan for the Village of Shepherd.

6.0 ZONING PERMIT AND VIOLATION ACTIVITY IN 2023

Staff issued 141 Zoning Permits in 2023 which is a slight increase from 2022. Though higher than the previous year, the number issued in 2023 is consistent with other previous years. As noted previously, staff also conducted nine (9) site plan reviews as a result of Zoning Amendment #08-08. Staff has reviewed more than 100 zoning complaints throughout the County including activities in Coe Township in which staff provides administrative support via an intergovernmental agreement.

7.0 ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS ACTIVITY IN 2023

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) heard requests from six (6) applicants for six (6) different variances. This was up from 2022 where the Appeals Board heard four (4) requests for a variance. The ZBA will review their actions early in 2024 and make any appropriate recommendations to the Planning Commission at that time.

8.0 ISABELLA COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

In October 2023, the Isabella County Administration Building was abruptly closed until further notice due to environmental conditions within the building. As such, the subsequent Planning Commission meeting in December was held at the Isabella County Commission on Aging Building.

9.0 PLANNING COMMISSION GOALS FOR 2024

- Continually review the Zoning Ordinance and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners on amendments to the Zoning Ordinance.
- The Planning Commission will continually review the zoning ordinance language regarding solar farms to ensure consistency with current industry standards.
- Maintain the open lines of communication between the Commission and the Townships. This was again ranked as the most important goal of the Master Plan

in the survey conducted with the 2022 update to the Master Plan. The Commission also believes that this is most important to best serve the people of Isabella County.

- *Staff will continue to communicate with Township Supervisors in an effort to maintain a high level of communication.*
- *The Commission will continue to maintain an agenda item for Township concerns for Township representatives in attendance at the Commission meeting.*

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