



2014
ISABELLA COUNTY
PLANNING COMMISSION
ANNUAL REPORT

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Isabella County Planning Commission

With assistance from:
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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 2014, the Planning Commission's membership was as follows:

Jerry Neyer, Chairperson*	Heather Turner (Resigned)
Kelly Bean, Vice-Chairperson*	Evelyn Kent*
Cheryl Jindeel, Secretary	Gordon Gilchrist
Jim Horton, BOC Representative	Jeremy Murphy
Phillip Vogel	

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

For 2015, the Board of Commissioners will be appointing three new members to replace Jerry Neyer, Heather Turner and Evelyn Kent as their present terms expired on December 31, 2014.

3.0 MEETINGS

The Planning Commission meetings were scheduled for the Second Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m. in Room 225 of the Isabella County Building. The Commission met every month in 2014 except October. In 2015, 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 eleven (11) regular meetings in 2014.

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.
- Annually prepare a capital improvements program 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 2014

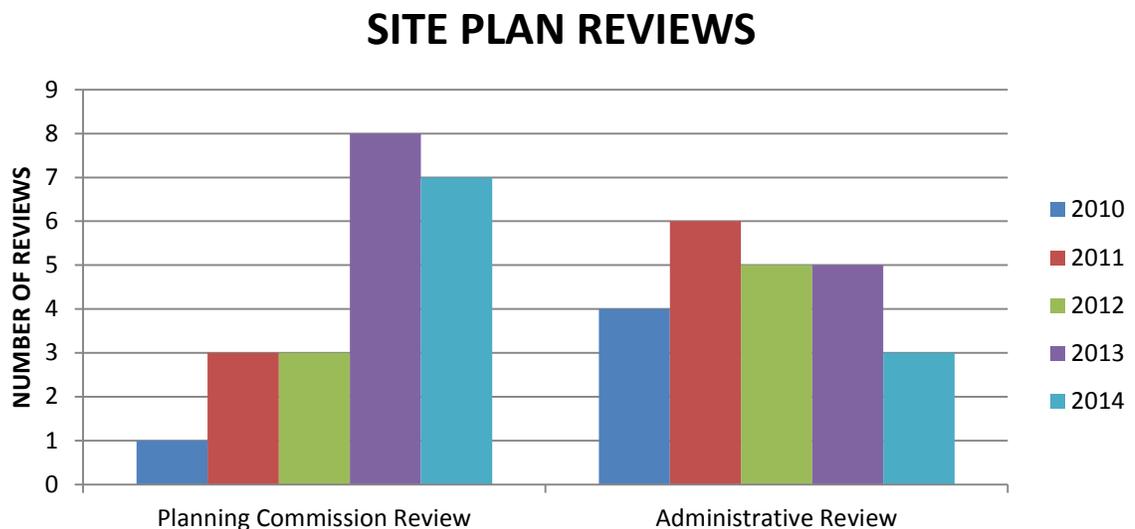
The Planning Commission continued to be active this past year as they strived to meet their goals for the year. The Commission continuously reviewed the Zoning Ordinance and in doing so, recommended multiple changes to the ordinance. This was done with careful consideration of the needs of the community and upholding the integrity of the County Master Plan. The Capital Improvement Plan was also updated in the spring of 2014 in an effort to get a better understanding of needs and desires for capital projects leading into the FY15 budget season. The Commission also continued active communication with the Townships. The following is a summary of all activity in 2014:

- 5.1 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN:** In 2014, the Commission prepared the Isabella County Capital Improvement Plan. It was subsequently adopted by the Board of Commissioners. The Plan was prepared after an extensive amount of research and title work was conducted on the various properties owned by Isabella

County. As part of the Plan, a Capital Improvements Program (CIP) lists the planned capital improvements for the next six (6) years with the estimated costs and funding sources for those improvements. The CIP was updated by the Planning Commission and forwarded to the Isabella County Board of Commissioners for approval at their July 1, 2014 meeting.

5.2 MASTER LAND USE PLAN REVIEW: The Planning Commission in 2014 reviewed the Master Plan on several occasions during requests for rezoning both conditional and traditional. 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. The last update was completed in January of 2013, therefore the next update should take place prior to January of 2018.

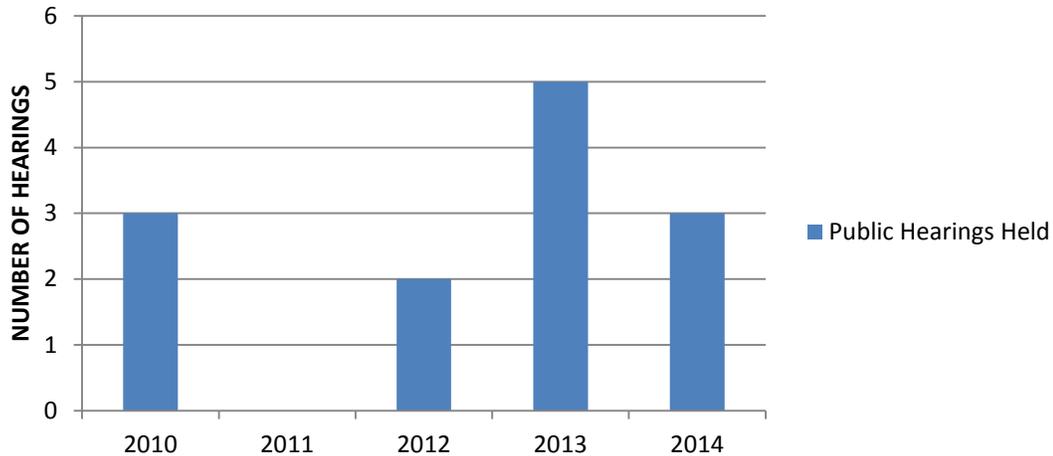
5.3 SITE PLAN REVIEWS: In 2014 a total of ten (10) site plan reviews were performed. Seven (7) of which were conducted by the Planning Commission and three (3) were conducted by staff. Since the Zoning Amendment in 2008 the Commission would like to point out that nearly half of all site plan reviews have been performed by the staff as per the amendment.



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.

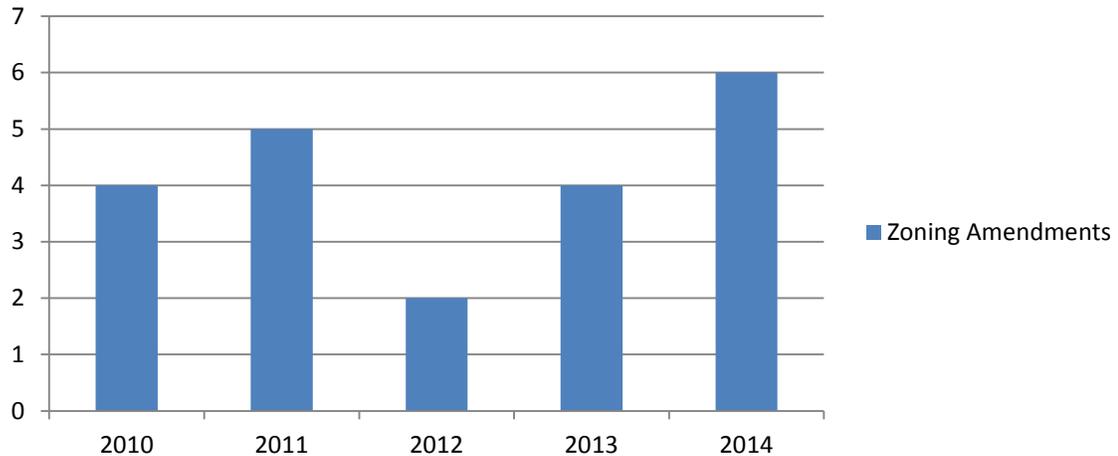
5.4 SPECIAL USE PERMITS: In 2014 the Commission held three (3) public hearings for Special Land Use Permits. The following is a comparison from 2010 – 2014:

SPECIAL USE PERMITS



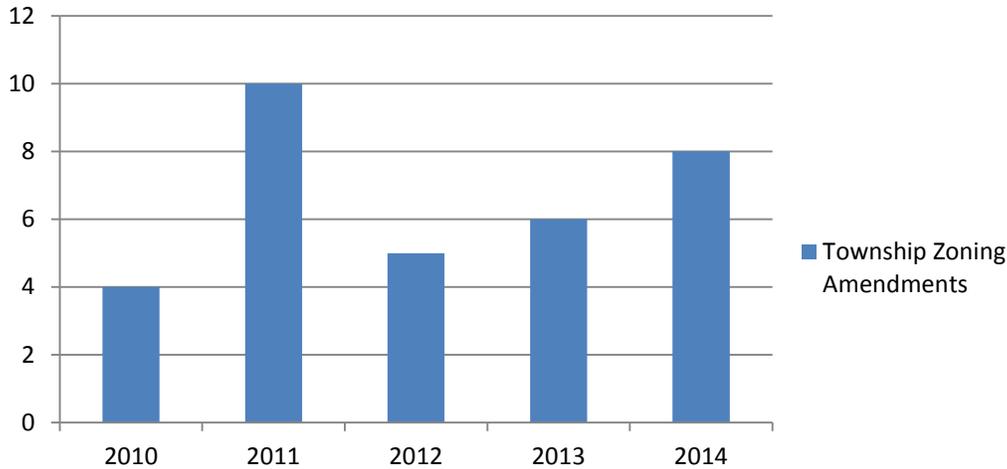
5.5 ZONING AMENDMENTS: In 2014 the Planning Commission held six (6) public hearings for Zoning Amendments, two (2) for text amendments and four (4) for map amendments to the Zoning Ordinance. Two (2) of the four (4) map amendments were Conditional (Contract type) Amendments. The following is a comparison from 2010 – 2014:

Zoning Amendments



5.6 REVIEW OF TOWNSHIP ZONING AMENDMENTS: In 2014, the Commission reviewed and commented on eight (8) zoning amendments. Union Township presented one (1) map amendment and one (1) text amendment for review and consideration during 2014. Sherman Township presented five (5) amendments which were all text amendments. Coe Township presented one (1) amendment which was a map amendment. The following is a comparison from 2010 – 2014:

Township Zoning Amendments



- 5.7 MASTER PLAN REVIEWS:** In 2014, the Commission reviewed and commented on one (1) Master Plan, Wise Township.

The Planning Commission also received a ‘notice of intent’ from Mecosta County stating that they intend to amend their respective Plan. The Community Development Department performed the Wise Township updates through an Intergovernmental Agreement.

- 5.8 FARMLAND AGREEMENT APPLICATIONS (PA 116):** In 2014, the Commission reviewed and commented on a total of twenty-four (24) Farmland Agreement Applications in nine (9) different Townships (Chippewa, Coe, Deerfield, Lincoln, Nottawa, Isabella, Rolland, Vernon and Wise). The applications represented a total of 1,717.5 acres entering the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program. This was a substantial increase from last year when the Commission reviewed thirteen (13) applications totaling 743 acres.

6.0 ZONING PERMIT AND VIOLATION ACTIVITY IN 2014

Staff issued 132 Zoning Permits in 2014 which is relatively steady from 2013. As noted above, staff also conducted three (3) 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 and Sherman Township(s) in which staff provides administrative support to via an intergovernmental agreement.

7.0 ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS ACTIVITY IN 2013

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) heard requests from two (2) applicants for two (2) different variances in 2014. The ZBA will review their actions early in 2014 and make any appropriate recommendations to the Planning Commission at that time.

8.0 TRAINING

In 2015, we are planning for a couple basic training sessions and will be applying for a RAP Grant through MMRMA to provide Master Citizen Planner Training for members.

9.0 PLANNING COMMISSION GOALS FOR 2014

- Continue the process of maintaining the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) as required by the MPEA.
 - *As stated above the Commission prepared and updated the Capital Improvement Program for 2014.*
- Continue to review and maintain the County Master Plan.
 - *The Commission reviewed the Plan on several occasions and have included the House property and the Browns Milling property along with review of Airport access plans filed as part of the next update to the Master Plan.*
- 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 a couple amendments to the Ordinance. Including: Mini-Warehouses and Pools.*
- 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 three townships regularly are in attendance at the Commission meeting and often make comments.*
- The Planning Commission will discuss the notification process for Variances, Special Use Permits, and Zoning Amendments. The Isabella County Board of Commissioners has requested that the Planning Commission review the area of notification and report back to them their findings with a recommendation.
 - *Staff has implemented a policy for notice in the Agricultural Districts which includes additional notice to the Clerk of the Township, notice radius expanded from 300' to 600', and the posting of "Zoning Issue Proposed" signs placed on site. Feedback so far has been positive with regard to the added notice policy.*