

# 2015 ISABELLA COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT



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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 2015, the Planning Commission's membership was as follows:

|                                 |                           |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Kelly Bean, Chairperson*        | Tim O'Neil                |
| Jeremy Murphy, Vice-Chairperson | Ann Silker                |
| Nancy White, Secretary          | Gordon Gilchrist          |
| Jim Horton, BOC Representative  | Cheryl Jindeal (Resigned) |
| Phillip Vogel                   |                           |

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

For 2016, the Board of Commissioners have appointed Erin Strang to complete a 3 year term ending December 31, 2016.

## 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 2015 except March, June, July, September and 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 eight (8) regular meetings in 2015.

## **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).

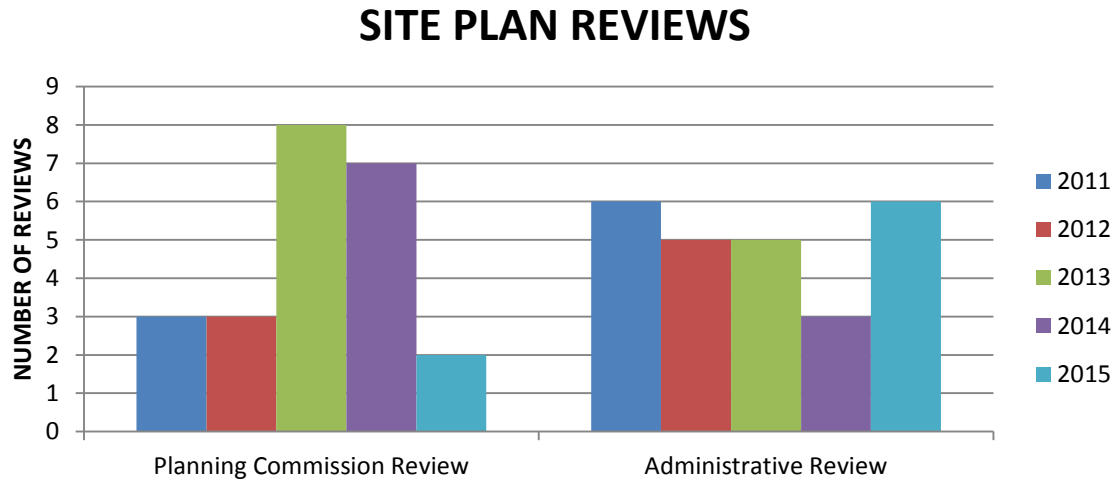
## **5.0 PLANNING COMMISSION ACTIVITY IN 2015**

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 Commission also continued active communication with the Townships. The following is a summary of all activity in 2015:

- 5.1 MASTER LAND USE PLAN REVIEW:** The Planning Commission in 2015 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

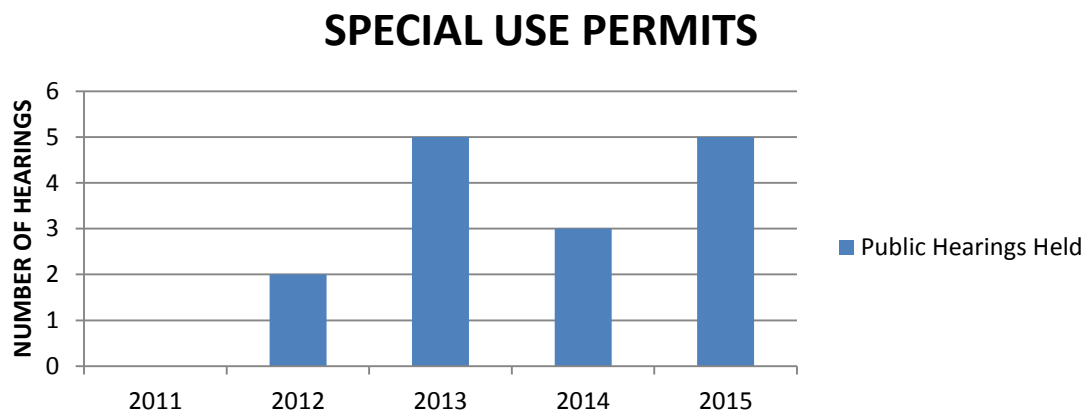
completed in January of 2013, therefore the next update should take place prior to January of 2018.

- 5.2 SITE PLAN REVIEWS:** In 2015 a total of eight (8) site plan reviews were performed. Two (2) of which were conducted by the Planning Commission and six (6) 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.



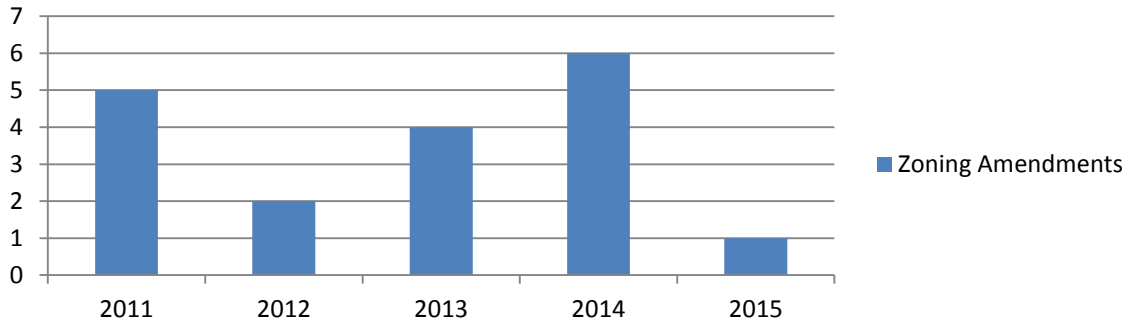
The Commission continues to see the benefit of reducing the number of applicants required to appear before the full Commission and expediting the permit process for those applicants.

- 5.3 SPECIAL USE PERMITS:** In 2015 the Commission held five (5) public hearings for Special Land Use Permits. The following is a comparison from 2011 thru 2015:



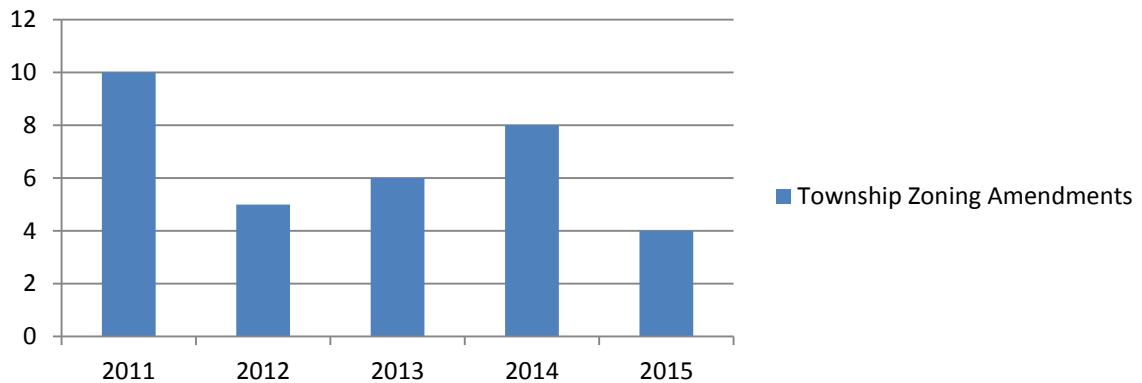
- 5.4 ZONING AMENDMENTS:** In 2015 the Planning Commission held one (1) public hearing for a single Map Amendment. They also reviewed language related to Agricultural Splits, Structures under 200 sq. ft. in Lake Areas and Communication Towers in which a public hearing will be held for each in January of 2016. The following is a comparison from 2011 – 2015:

## Zoning Amendments



**5.5 REVIEW OF TOWNSHIP ZONING AMENDMENTS:** In 2015, the Commission reviewed and commented on four (4) zoning amendments. Union Township presented one (1) map amendment and one (1) text amendment for review and consideration during 2015. Sherman Township presented one (1) amendment which was a text amendment. Coe Township presented one (1) amendment which was a text amendment. The following is a comparison from 2011 thru 2015:

## Township Zoning Amendments



**5.6 MASTER PLAN REVIEWS:** In 2015, the Commission reviewed and commented on no new Master Plans. The Planning Commission also received no new ‘notice of intents’ to amend a respective Plan.

**5.7 FARMLAND AGREEMENT APPLICATIONS (PA 116):** In 2015, the Commission reviewed and commented on a total of two (2) Farmland Agreement Applications in two (2) different Townships (Coe and Rolland). The applications represented a total of 237 acres entering the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program. This was a substantial decrease from last year when the Commission reviewed twenty-four (24) applications totaling 1,717.5 acres.

## 6.0 ZONING PERMIT AND VIOLATION ACTIVITY IN 2015

Staff issued 139 Zoning Permits in 2015 which is slightly up from 2014. As noted above, staff also conducted six (6) 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 2015**

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) heard requests from twelve (12) applicants for twelve (12) different variances in 2015. This was a substantial increase from 2014 where the Appeals Board heard only two (2) requests for Variance. The ZBA will review their actions early in 2015 and make any appropriate recommendations to the Planning Commission at that time.

## **8.0 TRAINING**

In 2015, the Community Development Department hosted a Citizen Planner five (5) week course by Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) and a single day Planning and Zoning Essentials Workshop by the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP). Staff also performed basic Site Plan Review Training in December of 2015. Staff will provide training on Special Use Permits and Zoning Amendments in 2016.

## **9.0 PLANNING COMMISSION GOALS FOR 2015**

- 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 map amendment in Isabella Township for the (House) Luthy Metals expansion and future developments.*
- 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.*