



ISABELLA COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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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 2021, the Planning Commission's membership was as follows:

Kelly Bean, Chairperson*	Kyle Camp
Tim O'Neil, Vice-Chairperson	Jerry Neyer
Ann Silker, Secretary	Bob Campbell
Steve Swaney, BOC Representative	Adam Brookens
Phillip Vogel	

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

3.0 MEETINGS

At the January 14, 2021 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. Beginning in May, 2020 the Planning Commission meetings were held electronically via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the Commission met in every month with the exception of March, June, July, August and September. All meetings are held in compliance with the Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976).

- The Planning Commission held seven (7) regular meetings in 2021.

4.0 PLANNING COMMISSION RESPONSIBILITIES

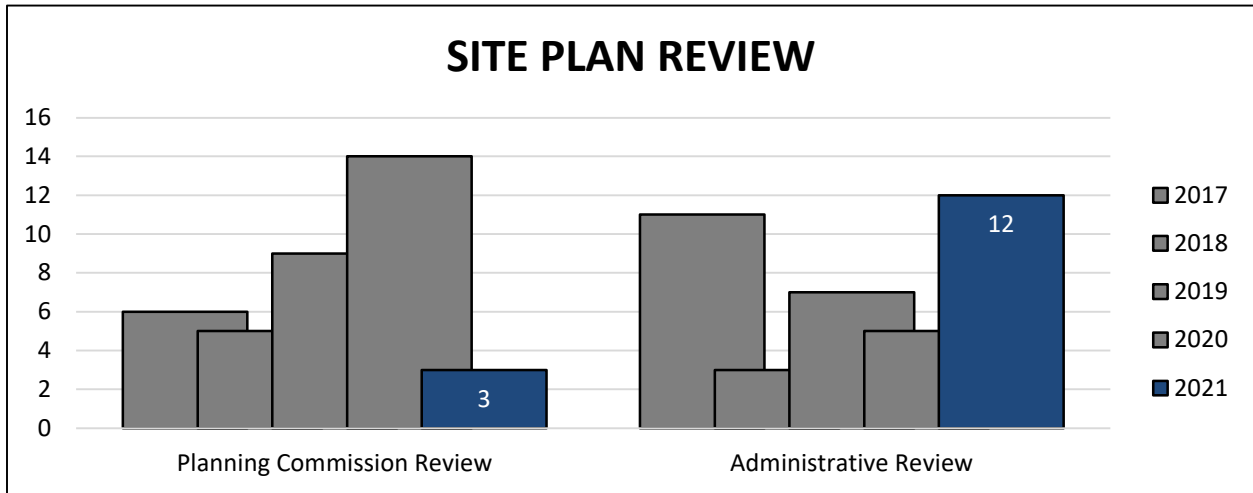
The Planning Commission's basic duties and responsibilities include the following:

- 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 2021

The Planning Commission continued to be somewhat active this past year holding electronic meetings and operating under a Local State of Emergency due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. The Commission continuously reviewed the Zoning Ordinance and in doing so, recommended a change to the 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 2021:

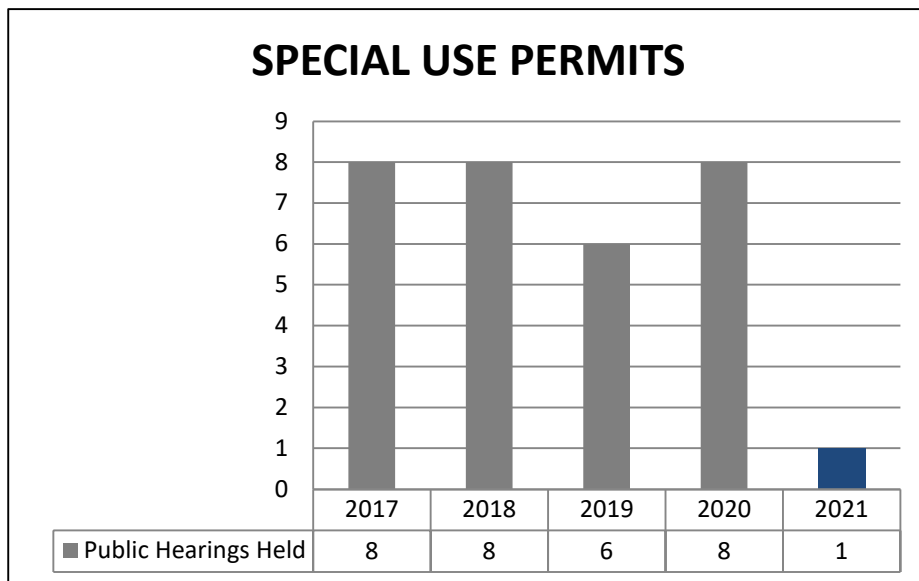
- 5.1 Master Land Use Plan Review:** Staff reviews the Master Plan annually and may recommend changes to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commissions last update of the Master Plan was performed in 2012. Since 2013, a few areas have been identified for updating upon the next Master Plan update. 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 in the near future utilizing the available 2020 census data.



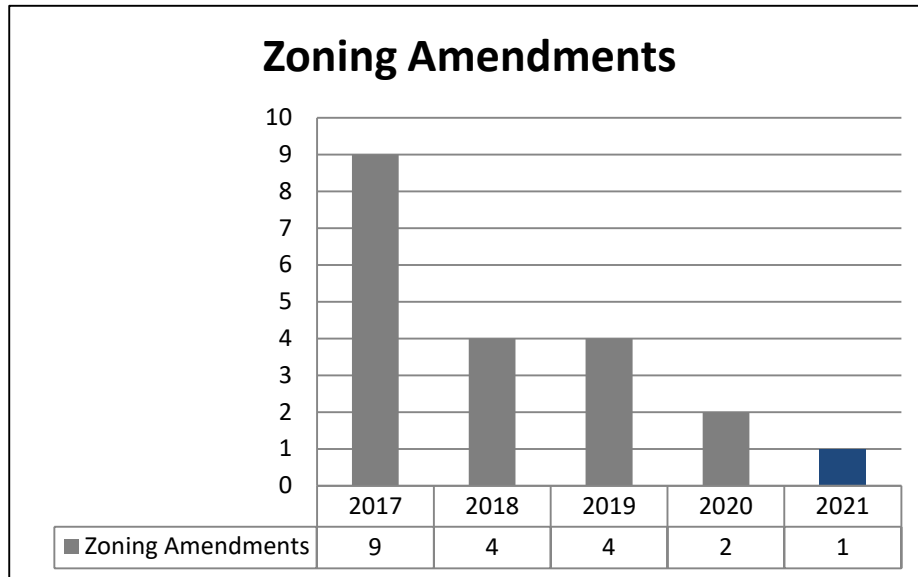
5.2 Site Plan Reviews: In 2021 a total of fifteen (15) site plan reviews were performed. Three (3) of which were conducted by the Planning Commission and twelve (12) were conducted by staff. Site plan reviews conducted by the Planning Commission and staff included new commercial businesses, a private road and industrial expansions. Overall, this was a slight decrease from 2020 where nineteen (19) 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.

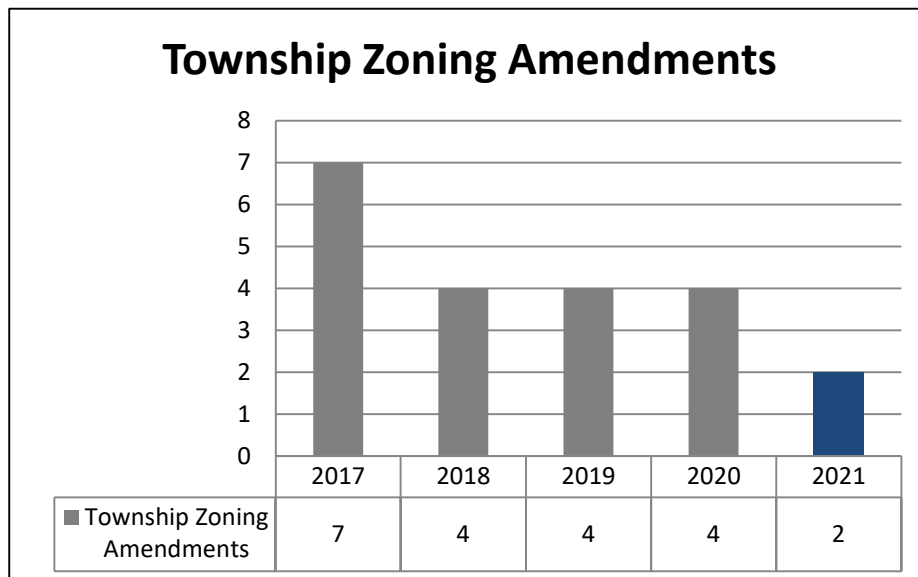
5.3 Special Use Permits: In 2021 the Commission held one (1) public hearing for a Special Land Use Permit. This is much lower than the average number of public hearings held each year since 2017. The following is a comparison from 2017 – 2021:



5.4 Zoning Amendments: In 2021 the Planning Commission held one (1) public hearing for a Map Amendment. The Planning Commission reviewed and recommended the proposed amendment for approval. The recommendation was sent to the County Board of Commissioners for final action. The following is a comparison from 2017 – 2021:



5.5 Review of Township Zoning Amendments: In 2021, the Commission reviewed and commented on two (2) zoning amendments. Union Township presented one (1) map amendment and one (1) text amendment for review and comment. The text amendment included significant changes and updates to the Township’s 2021 Zoning Ordinance. The following is a comparison of Township zoning amendments from 2017 thru 2021:



5.6 Master Plan Reviews: In May of 2021, the Commission was presented with a notice of intent that Wise Township was preparing to revise their Master Plan.

5.7 Farmland Agreement Applications (PA 116): In 2021, the Commission reviewed and commented on a total of seven (7) Farmland Agreement applications in six (6) different Townships (Chippewa, Coe, Coldwater, Deerfield, Isabella, and Rolland). The applications represented a total of more than 367 acres entering the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program. This was an increase from 2020 when the Commission reviewed four (4) applications totaling 147 acres.

5.8 Additional Activities

In addition to the previously noted activities, the Planning Commission made minor modifications in May of 2021 to the Planning Commission By-Laws which fulfilled a Planning Commission goal for 2021.

The Planning Commission also selected Ken Kaliski of RSG to conduct a post construction sound study for the Isabella Wind Turbine Project throughout central Isabella County. The Isabella County Zoning Ordinance assigns responsibility to the Planning Commission to select a qualified third-party professional to conduct the post construction sound study for wind energy conversion systems (i.e., Wind Turbines).

6.0 ZONING PERMIT AND VIOLATION ACTIVITY IN 2021

Staff issued 154 Zoning Permits in 2021 which is a slight increase from 2020. The number issued in 2021 is consistent with previous years. As noted previously, staff also conducted twelve (12) 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 via an intergovernmental agreement.

7.0 ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS ACTIVITY IN 2021

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) heard requests from four (4) applicants for four (4) different variances. This was a moderate decrease from 2020 where the Appeals Board heard ten (10) requests for a variance and two (2) essential public services. The ZBA will review their actions early in 2022 and make any appropriate recommendations to the Planning Commission at that time.

8.0 TRAINING

No outside training was scheduled in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

9.0 PLANNING COMMISSION GOALS FOR 2022

- Continue to review and maintain the County Master Plan.
 - *As a part of the next review of the Master Plan, the Chair will consider asking staff to update the Master Plan to reflect the available 2020 census data.*
- Continue to review the Zoning Ordinance and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners on amendments to the Zoning Ordinance.
- 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 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.*