

- AGENDA -

REGULAR MEETING OF THE WEST BRANCH PLANNING COMMISSION TO BE HELD AT THE WEST BRANCH CITY HALL, 121 N. FOURTH ST. ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2024, BEGINNING AT 6:00 PM

- I. Call to Order
- II. Roll Call
- III. Pledge of Allegiance.
- IV. Additions to the agenda
- V. Public Hearing
- VI. Public Comment – Agenda Items Only – 3 Minute Limit (general rule)
- VII. Approval of Minutes from the meetings held January 9, 2024 and February 5, 2024
- VIII. Site Plan review
- IX. Sign Permit
- X. Unfinished Business
- XI. New Business
 - A. Economic Development Strategy
 - B. Approval of 2023 Annual report
- XII. Communications
- XIII. Reports and/or comments
 - A. Chairperson Report
 - B. Member Reports
 - C. Zoning Administrator Report.
- XIV. Public Comment – Any Topic – 3 Minute Limit (general rule)
- XV. Adjournment

Next meeting: Tuesday, November 14, 2023, 6:00 pm

REGULAR MEETING OF THE WEST BRANCH PLANNING COMMISSION HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS
OF CITY HALL, 121 NORTH FOURTH STREET, ON TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024.

Chairperson Cori Lucynski called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Present: Bob David, Yvonne DeRoso, Mike Jackson, Cori Lucynski, and Rusty Showalter.

Absent: Josh Erickson and Kara Fachting

Others officers in attendance: Acting secretary/zoning administrator, John Dantzer

* * * * *

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

* * * * *

At 6:01, Chairperson Lucynski opened the public hearing to take comment on ordinance 24-01. Chairperson Lucynski noted the ordinance would amend section 4.6 (Mixed Use District), section 4.8 (Central Business District), section 4.9 (General Business District) and section 4.11 (full table of permitted uses and special land uses) and to amend the City of West Branch zoning map to rezone parcel 052-455-004-00 from Single-Family Residential District to General Business District, parcel 052-458-001-00 from Central Business District to General Business District, and parcel 052-630-040-00 from General Business District /Multiple Family District to General Business District.

Chairperson Lucynski read a letter received from George Foust noting his objection to the rezoning on parcel 052-630-040-00 noting it was not a fit for business. He further noted he did not purchase his property for business and that wildlife would be negatively affected and that if they made this unwise decision, assurances must be done to prevent any sewer system problems, have trees or steps to hide development with the maintenance cost the responsibility of the owners or the city, and to reduce noise issues and the chance for criminal activity.

Shelby and Clara Roach spoke and noted they were not in favor of the rezoning of parcel 052-630-040-00 because they were concerned about the commercial zoning towards the back of the property. The Commission noted the rezoning for that particular parcel was to fix an error on the zoning map. It was further noted the parcel is currently the home to the Villa and that the zoning map actually shows two different zoning districts within their parcel with the north section of it being zoned Multi-Family Residential and the south section being zoned General Business. It was further noted that parcel has been used for commercial purposes and should not have been labeled as Multi-family residential.

Ms. Roach asked what the differences between the Central Business and General Business Districts were. Member Jackson explained that each district would have their own set of uses allowed by right or special use with the Central Business District being more restrictive and that the Central Business District was typically only for the main downtown area.

No one else wished to speak on the issue.

MOTION BY DEROSO, SECOND BY DAVID, TO CLOSE THE PUBLIC HEARING.

Yes — David, DeRoso, Jackson, Lucynski, Showalter

No – None

Absent –Erickson, Fachting

Motion carried

**MOTION BY DEROSO, SECOND BY SHOWALTER, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES WITH
CORRECTIONS FROM THE MEETING HELD NOVEMBER 7, 2023.**

Yes — David, DeRoso, Jackson, Lucynski, Showalter

No – None

Absent –Erickson, Fachting

Motion carried

Zoning permit ZP-01 for 203 N. Fifth St was reviewed by the Commission. Zoning administrator Dantzer noted he did not see any issues with the plans submitted and noted all lot and building restrictions were met, the use was allowed by right, the setbacks and structural standards were met, and all parking requirement were met. He did note that because this parcel is commercial and abuts a residential property to its north, it would require a buffer of some sort. He further noted there was a tree line already on the property line between the two parcels and could be considered as the buffer if the Commission deemed it adequate.

Mary Bachelder noted there were no changes to the footprint of the building except for the covered porch and handicap ramp at the entrance to the front door.

The Commission discussed the current tree line at the property line and it was the consensus that it was adequate to support the buffer requirement.

**MOTION BY DAVID, SECOND BY SHOWALTER, TO APPROVE PERMIT ZP-01 AT 203 N. FIFTH ST
AS PRESENTED.**

Yes — David, DeRoso, Jackson, Lucynski, Showalter

No – None

Absent –Erickson, Fachting

Motion carried

**MOTION BY SHOWALTER, SECOND BY DEROSO, TO APPOINT MEMBER LUCYNSKI TO SERVE AS
CHAIRPERSON, MEMBER DAVID TO SERVE AS VICE-CHAIRPERSON, AND ZONING
ADMINISTRATOR/CITY MANAGER JOHN DANTZER TO SERVE AS SECRETRAY FOR THE 2024
CALENDAR YEAR.**

Yes — David, DeRoso, Jackson, Lucynski, Showalter

No – None

Absent –Erickson, Fachting

Motion carried

Updated bylaws were presented to make the following changes to sections 4.1.1 and 4.3.7 of the bylaws.

Change section 4.1.1 to read as follows: Officers. Officers of the Commission are appointed members of the commission and shall consist of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Secretary. The Commission may appoint other officers if deemed appropriate.

Change section 4.3.7 to read as follows: Election. The Commission shall, at the first practical meeting, select a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson from its membership, as well as a Secretary who does not have to be from its membership, to serve for a (12) month period, and who shall be eligible for re-election. Newly elected officers shall assume their office immediately after the election. Vacancies in office shall be filled immediately by regular election procedure.

MOTION BY JACKSON, SECOND BY SHOWALTER, TO APPROVE CHANGES TO SECTION 4.1.1 AND 4.3.7 OF THE BYLAWS AS PRESENTED.

Yes — David, DeRoso, Jackson, Lucynski, Showalter

No – None Absent –Erickson, Fachting Motion carried

MOTION BY LUCYNSKI, SECOND BY DAVID, TO RECOMMEND THE REAPPOINTMENTS OF RUSTY SHOWALTER AND KARA FACHTING TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION FOR THREE-YEAR TERMS.

Yes — David, DeRoso, Jackson, Lucynski, Showalter

No – None Absent –Erickson, Fachting Motion carried

MOTION BY DEROSO, SECOND BY LUCINSKI, TO RECOMMEND TO CITY COUNCIL THE APPROVAL OF ORDINANCE 24-01 WHICH WOULD REZONE PARCEL # 052-455-004-00 FROM SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT TO GENERAL BUSINESS DISTRICT, REZONE PARCEL # 052-458-001-00 FROM CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT TO GENERAL BUSINESS DISTRICT, REZONE PARCEL 052-630-040-00 FROM GENERAL BUSINESS DISTRICT /MULTIPLE FAMILY DISTRICT TO GENERAL BUSINESS DISTRICT, AND UPDATE THE FULL TABLE OF PERMITTED AND SPECIAL LAND USES BECAUSE THE ZONING IS CONSISTENT WITH THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MASTERPLAN, IS CONSISTENT WITH THE SURROUNDING USES, DOES NOT POSE AN IMPACT ON THE SURROUNDING PROPERTIES, DOES NOT CREATE A DETERRENT TO THE IMPROVEMENT OR DEVELOPMENT OF ADJACENT PROPETIES, WILL NOT CREATE A SPECIAL PRIVELGE TO AN INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY OWNER, AND WILL POSE NO IMPACT TO THE CITY’S INFRASTRUCTURE OR PROGRAMS.

Yes — David, DeRoso, Erickson, Fachting, Jackson, Lucynski, Showalter

No – None Absent –None Motion carried

A reminder of the annual joint meeting with City Council and DDA was shared.

Chairperson Lucynski asked about the downtown markings on the sidewalks. Administrator Dantzer noted those were used to mark utilities running under the sidewalk.

Member David noted he has heard from many people who were concerned with the downtown utility work causing traffic issues.

Member DeRoso noted the County was establishing a Housing Committee and that she was going to serve as a representative from Ogemaw Township. Member Jackson noted the City approved City Manager John Dantzer and City Council Member Cathy Zimmerman to that Committee to serve on the City's behalf.

Member DeRoso also asked about the Redevelopment Ready Community designation. It was noted the City was currently working towards the designation and had only a few steps remaining. Administrator Dantzer noted one of the last steps were to develop an Economic Development Strategy and that the Commission would start working on that during the February meeting.

Member Jackson asked on an update to the running of internet in the Industrial Park. Administrator Dantzer noted the project was completed.

Member Showalter noted he was happy to see the internet project was done and that it would be a great addition for the businesses in the park.

Chairperson Lucynski closed the meeting at 6:39 pm.

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE WEST BRANCH PLANNING COMMISSION HELD JOINTLY WITH CITY COUNCIL AND THE DDA AT THE WEST BRANCH POLICE DEPARTMENT, 130 PAGE STREET, ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2024.

Chairperson Cori Lucynski called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Present: Bob David, Yvonne DeRoso, Cori Lucynski, and Rusty Showalter

Absent: Josh Erickson, Kara Fachting, and Mike Jackson

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairperson Lucynski gave the annual update to City Council and noted during 2023, the Commission twice made recommended changes to the zoning code. The two recommendations changed zoning districts for a few parcels in the City to better zone them for uses that were more practical for the area they were located in and better for the City. The Commission also changed the table of uses for uses allowed by right or by special use in the Mixed-Use District. The Commission reviewed the Masterplan and approved a new Capital Improvement plan. The Commission continued work towards the implementation of the Redevelopment Ready Communities program guidelines, pursuant to the Resolution of Participation in the RRC Program that was passed by the Planning Commission in November of 2015. The Commission will focus their attention to the development of a marketing strategy during the 2024 calendar year. The Commission will continue to hold joint annual meetings with both City Council and the DDA. The Planning Commission also participated in a series of virtual trainings on the Michigan Planning Act.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:07 pm

3.0 VISION

SWOT ANALYSIS

The SWOT Survey

The acronym SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. A SWOT analysis provides a mechanism for an organization to review internal strengths and weaknesses against external opportunities and threats. Internal strengths and weaknesses are typical under the control of the organization. In contrast, the external opportunities and threats are influences outside the power of the organization resulting from market trends, policies, or other elements that could be exploited or cause trouble.

A SWOT Analysis is usually a preliminary step in the decision-making process leading to the creation of a strategic plan and a realistic action program. The SWOT Analysis as part of the West Branch Strategic Plan, was prepared digitally with an invitation to thirteen community stakeholders. Out of the thirteen (13) members, ten (10) members took the survey, which is a 77% return rate. The survey consisted of the following:

Based on the SWOT comments (Q.1 – Q.4), themes began to emerge, and statements were grouped under these themes. The topics included Government, Housing, Health Care, Market/Economic Development, Child Care, Education, Labor, and People/Residents. Tables X through X on the following pages lists by SWOT category the individual response. Table X aggregates the major SWOT themes and significant observations into an aggregated table to compare S, W, O, and T.

Table X and X summarize the findings of Q.5 and Q.6

Survey Results

The SWOT Analysis noted that the strengths for West Branch are focused on a proactive City Council and DDA, affordably priced housing, the community's access and adjacency to I-75 (Exit 212 and 215), the City's historic and vibrant downtown, location in relation to natural and recreational resources, and the local residents. On the other hand, weaknesses were noted for the need for

QUESTION	TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Q.1-Q.4	TEXT BOX	SWOT ASSESSMENT Each question was a text box asking for terms or statements regarding strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
Q.5	MATRIX Rating Scale	LOCAL CONDITIONS AND TRENDS A variety of statements on housing, child care, job creation, job skills, and downtown
Q.6	MATRIX Rating Scale	RELATIONSHIPS Explored relationships between local, county, and state agencies.

TABLE X: STRENGTHS - WEST BRANCH AREA (*INTERNAL*)

GOVERNMENT

- New City Council – passionate, dedicated and pro-growth
- Collaborative DDA's
- Strong group of leaders

HOUSING

- Abundant low cost of living
- Reasonable housing costs

HEALTH CARE

- 2 Hospitals

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Airport
- Infrastructure in decent shape (not Flint)
- Highways gateway to north outdoor activities

MARKET / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Vibrant downtown (2)
- Historic downtown, zero lot lines
- Strong business association
- Active merchants
- Growing business base
- Progressive & active Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Bureau
- WB is the county hub
- Location (2)
- central to the State of MI
- Downtown Community Events
- Defined downtown district
- Some significant businesses that serve as a draw for visitors
- Hub (shopping, medical, restaurant, services) for people who live in surrounding rural areas

TOURISM

- The various organization in the community work very well together in trying to create a culture of constant learning, growth and economic advancement (Chamber, Visitor's Bureau, Downtown Merchants, City, etc.).
- Many events

PEOPLE

- Volunteers
- Community oriented people
- Community comes together to support

RECREATION

- River Walk and Irons Park
- Trails, and potential growth
- Hunting, Fishing, Boating, and Hiking
- State Land & Forests
- Year-round tourist destination, Tons of recreation and things to do and offer
- Golf Courses (4)
- Natural Resources

TABLE X: WEAKNESSES - WEST BRANCH AREA (*INTERNAL*)

GOVERNMENT

- City has high taxes with little return
- Reduced Public Safety

HOUSING

- Need for middle range housing
- Lack of Affordable Housing
- Housing
- Need middle class housing or apartments
- Lack of housing for young families

HEALTH CARE

- No OB/GYN
- No Pediatricians
- No dermatologists
- Lack of mental health

MARKET / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- limited "things" to do- nightlife, restaurants, not a lot of variety
- Cooperation between businesses of all types
- Lack of diversity in retail market downtown
- "There is not enough here".
- Lack of knowledge of what we have to offer

CHILD CARE

- Need for affordable & available childcare
- Winters long lack of daycare options
- Day Care

EDUCATION

- No college
- Low Education / Illiteracy
- lack of a Christian education option for the High School level.
- More education on interviews and how to present yourself

LABOR

- Need more educational opportunities for unskilled labor
- Lack of high paying jobs
- skills gap-many people do not want to improve themselves
- Labor force with basic work skills, attendance, values, etc.
- There is definitely a lack of skilled labor.
- Finding and retaining qualified individuals for my company has proved to be quite challenging.
- Skilled labor
- Lack of manufacturing/industry jobs (2)

PEOPLE / RESIDENTS

- Not enough young families
- High levels of welfare
- People living off system
- People not taking advantage of opportunities
- Not drawing young families because of housing
- Too many drugs

TABLE X: OPPORTUNITIES - WEST BRANCH AREA (*EXTERNAL*)

EDUCATION

How to leverage Kirtland Community College for local, accessible vocational training

GOVERNMENT

The City recently purchased land for a multifamily housing complex.

The City recently purchased a large lot to expand the industrial park in order to try and attract businesses to bring jobs to the area.

Opportunity zone

Brownfield Authority

Tax abatements in the two Industrial Parks. Obsolete building Authority

Consider tax abatement as business attraction?

HOUSING

Bedroom community for tri-city area and Grayling with the new plant

HEALTH CARE

Additional hospital should bring opportunity

New medical facility

Expanding hospital facility

Opportunity to be a medical destination

INFRASTRUCTURE

Airport could be a regional hub for passenger traffic

Ease of Highway Access - 2 Exits for I-75 (2)

City & Township Water/Sewer Hookup

Recent Road / Infrastructure Improvements

MARKET / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Farmers could develop co-op for creamery, direct to consumer meats, farmer markets etc

Sporting goods store

Create group or organization to actively recruit new businesses to community

More industrial development which brings more jobs

Signage to the opportunities we already have

Active chamber, townships, and city

RECREATION

Nature and outdoor activities are abundant

Dog Park

Connecting Trails from the hotels and motels

Availability of natural resources

TABLE X: THREATS - WEST BRANCH AREA (*EXTERNAL*)

BROADBAND / INTERNET

- Lack of county wide high-speed internet.
- lack of internet access high speed
- Ease of Access to High Speed Internet Services
- Lack of high-speed internet
- Broadband

EDUCATION

- Lack of higher paying jobs
- Community College Relocated Out of County
- Stable work force
- Lack of higher education facilities and training

FUNDING

- Shrinking revenue sharing from the State government.
- Lack of funding

GOVERNMENT

- Governmental units getting involved in housing/land purchases
- States directional policy regarding tourism
- Urban sprawl
- High taxes

INFRASTRUCTURE

- State road work focused in metro areas
- Infrastructure is aging

PEOPLE

- Illegal drug use

TABLE XX: SWOT SUMMARY BY CATEGORY

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
BROADBAND / INTERNET		
CHILD CARE		Need affordable & available childcare
EDUCATION		
FUNDING		No local college; Kirkland left County; Lack of Christian education options
GOVERNMENT	New City Council that is dedicated and pro-growth; collaborative DDA's	City has high taxes; Reduced Public Safety
HEALTH CARE		No OBGYN; No Pediatricians; No Dermatologists; Lack of mental health; Too many drugs
HOUSING	Affordable Housing	Need middle range housing; Lack of affordable housing; Lack of housing for young families
INFRASTRUCTURE	Airport, I-75 exits	
LABOR		More educational opportunities for unskilled labor; Lack of high paying jobs; Labor force with basic skills (attendance, values, etc.); Lack of skilled labor
MARKET / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	Vibrant and historic downtown; Progressive Chamber & CVB; Central location in State; County Hub for retail and restaurants; Strong downtown business association	Limited things to do; Lack of cooperation between businesses; Lack of knowledge of what the West Branch market offers
PEOPLE	Volunteers; Community-oriented	Not enough young families; High level of residents on welfare; Not drawing young families
RECREATION	Local parks; Hunting; Fishing; Boating; Golf Courses (4); Access to State and Federal Forests	

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS / CHALLENGES	
	Lack of county-wide high speed Internet	BROADBAND / INTERNET
		CHILD CARE
How to leverage Kirtland Community College	Community College relocated outside County; Stable workforce; Lack of higher education facilities and training	EDUCATION
	Shrinking revenue from State	FUNDING
City's purchase of property for housing; Opportunity Zone and Tax Abatements; Brownfield Authority; Industrial Park	Government getting involved in housing development; State's policy on tourism	GOVERNMENT
Mid-Michigan and McLaren		HEALTH CARE
Bedroom community		HOUSING
Airport as regional hub for passenger traffic; Exit 212 & 215 on I-75; City & Township water & sewer hook-up	State's focus on metro roads; infrastructure is aging; urban sprawl	INFRASTRUCTURE
		LABOR
Leveraging local farm community; Sporting goods store; additional industrial-related jobs; Signage (Wayfinding)		MARKET / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
	Illegal drug use	PEOPLE
Dog Park; Connecting trails from hotels and motels		RECREATION

an affordable and available child, especially very young children, no local college, the need for middle-range market housing, educational opportunities for unskilled workers, the absence of some medical specialties, and the reduced number of younger families living in, or moving into the community.

External opportunities noted the City's acquisition of property for housing and industrial development, the fact that both Mid-Michigan Health and McLaren Health Care have facilities in the City, the presence of two I-75 interchanges (Exit 212 and 215), the airport as a potential commerce and passenger hub, continued development of regional trails, and leveraging the local farm community. External threats focused on the lack of high-speed Internet infrastructure, the lack of a community college, maintaining a stable workforce, shrinking revenue from the State, the State's focus on metro, not rural roads, and the incidence of drug use and its associated impacts.

Because economic development relies on relationships and partnerships, the level of collaboration between the City and its potential partners is critical. Q.6 of the survey explored the current level of collaboration between the City and other entities. In terms of intergovernmental collaboration, it seems most respondents agreed that relationships between the local units of government and Ogemaw County could improve. This held true for County government, the Ogemaw County Land Bank, and the Ogemaw County Brownfield Authority. There was a strong consensus that the City and the Chamber of Commerce have a very beneficial relationship, and that collaboration between the City and its adjacent Township neighbors are good to fair. Lastly, MEDC was given a higher collaboration rating than the Ogemaw County EDC.

TABLE XX: LEVEL OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN UNITS OF GOVERNMENT

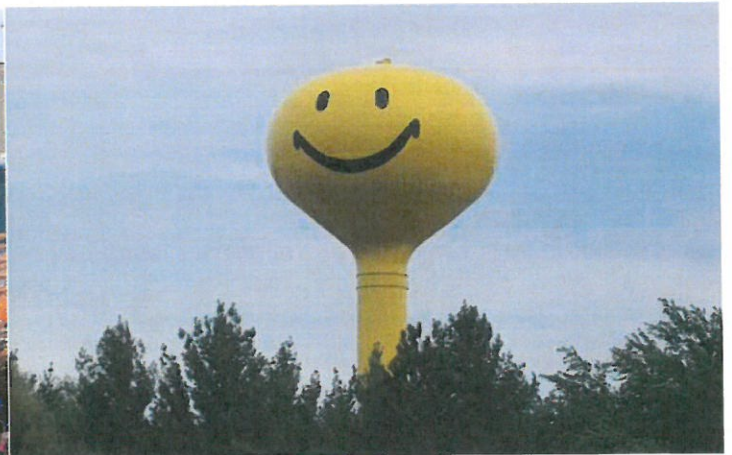
	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	VERY POOR	TOTAL
CITY AND WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP	10.00%	40.00%	40.00%	10.00%	0.00%	10
CITY AND OGEMAW TOWNSHIP	20.00%	40.00%	40.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
CITY AND OGEMAW COUNTY BOARD	0.00%	20.00%	10.00%	60.00%	10.00%	10
CITY AND THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE	60.00%	40.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
CITY AND OGEMAW COUNTY EDC	0.00%	10.00%	60.00%	20.00%	10.00%	10
CITY AND MICHIGAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION	10.00%	30.00%	60.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
CITY AND OGEMAW COUNTY BROWNFIELD AUTHORITY	0.00%	10.00%	40.00%	30.00%	20.00%	10
CITY AND OGEMAW COUNTY LAND BANK	0.00%	20.00%	30.00%	40.00%	10.00%	10

TABLE XX: CONSENSUS STATEMENTS ON LOCAL TOPICS

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
WEST BRANCH NEEDS CHILD CARE FOR CHILDREN LESS THAN 5 YEARS OF AGE.	60.00%	30.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
WEST BRANCH NEEDS TO ATTRACT MORE MANUFACTURING FIRMS.	50.00%	40.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
WEST BRANCH NEEDS MARKET RATE SINGLE FAMILY HOUSING.	30.00%	70.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
WEST BRANCH NEEDS MARKET RATE APARTMENTS.	30.00%	60.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
DOWNTOWN WEST BRANCH HAS A GOOD MIX OF RESTAURANTS.	10.00%	90.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
WEST BRANCH NEEDS TO HAVE A STRONGER COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESENCE.	30.00%	50.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
WEST BRANCH NEEDS WORKFORCE HOUSING (HOUSING THAT IS AVAILABLE TO FAMILIES MAKING BETWEEN 60% AND 120% OF AREA MEDIAN INCOME)	30.00%	40.00%	30.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
WEST BRANCH NEEDS BETTER TOOLS TO ENFORCE BLIGHT AND OBSOLETE PROPERTIES.	30.00%	30.00%	40.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
DOWNTOWN WEST BRANCH HAS A GOOD MIX OF RETAIL STORES.	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	40.00%	0.00%	10
THE CITY, TOWNSHIP, AND COUNTY WORK COLLABORATIVELY TO SOLVE ISSUES	0.00%	40.0%	20.0%	40.00%	0.00%	10



2023 Annual Report



City of West Branch Planning Commission
2023 Annual Report

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS

	<i>Term Expiration</i>
Michael (Mike) Jackson , Planning Commissioner	Council Term
Corine Lucynski , Planning Commissioner Chair	11/30/25
Rusty Showalter , Planning Commissioner	11/30/26
Josh Erickson , Planning Commissioner	11/30/24
Kara Fachting , Planning Commissioner	11/30/26
Robert (Bob) David , Planning Commissioner Vice Chair	11/30/25
Yvonne DeRoso , Planning Commissioner	11/30/24

Purpose of the Annual Report

In accordance with Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008, the City of West Branch's Planning Commission provides a written report to the legislative body on an annual basis. This report reflects the Planning Commission operations and the status of planning activities and includes recommendations regarding actions needed by the legislative body related to planning and development. The Planning Commission serves to promote orderly development within the City. The purpose of this annual report is to communicate to the governing body and the citizens of the City of West Branch the activities of the Planning Commission, and the status of planning within the City.

2023 Meeting Schedule

Meetings are held at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers at West Branch City Hall on the second Tuesday of the month, and fourth Tuesdays, as needed.

During the calendar year of 2023, the City of West Branch Planning Commission had meetings on the following dates:

- January 10th
- February 6th
- February 21st
- March 14th
- April 11th
- April 14th
- May 9th
- July 25th
- August 22nd
- September 12th
- October 10th
- November 7th

What is Zoning

Zoning is the public regulation of land use; it is the division of a community into districts or zones and the establishment of regulations governing the use, placement, spacing and size of land and buildings. The regulations are found in the text of the zoning ordinance and the accompanying zoning map. The City of West Branch adopts local zoning codes to enforce regulations to protect the public health, safety and general welfare of its citizens. The authority to adopt zoning is granted to local units of government through the state legislature via the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, Public Act 110 of 2006, set forth at MCL 125.3101, *et. seq.* Zoning is adopted and enforced to ensure that natural resources are protected, to prevent nuisances, to ensure land use compatibility, to prevent overcrowding and to prevent the overuse of land. Zoning codes adopted must also conserve property values and natural resources.

Duties of the Planning Commissioners

The Planning Commission is responsible for the development and maintenance of the Master Plan. The Master Plan identifies the current zoning districts and the future zoning districts as well as the goals and vision for the community. In addition, the Planning Commission is the authority in charge of approving special land uses, site plans, all land developments and provides recommendations to the legislative body on planning and zoning amendments and re-zoning requests. The Planning Commission is also tasked with the development of the Capital Improvement plan. The Planning Commission meets the second Tuesday of each month, and also meets the fourth Tuesday of each month when there is business to conduct. Regular meetings are held in the Council Chambers at West Branch City Hall, 121 N. 4th St., West Branch, MI 48661 at 6:00 PM. Special meetings are held at various times to accommodate the requests before the Commission. All meetings are open to the public and are posted on our City website at www.westbranch.com.

Planning Commission Members

The City of West Branch Planning Commission is made up of seven (7) members, serving three (3) year terms [with the exception of the City Councilmember representatives on the Commission, who serve as long as their Council term]. The seven members are appointed by the Mayor of the City of West Branch, subject to approval by a majority of the City Council. The membership has adopted By-Laws and Rules of Procedure, which outline their operations. Residents wishing to serve as Planning Commission Members may submit an application to the City of West Branch Clerk and said applicants will be considered as terms expire and/or when an opening has occurred. The makeup of the City of West Branch Planning Commission during the 2023 calendar year was as follows:

Name	Segment	Phone	Term Expiration	Email
Mike Jackson	Government	(989) 345-0500	Council Term	jacksonwbcouncil@westbranch.com
Corine Lucynski	Health	(989) 345-0500	11/30/25	lucynskiwbplanning@westbranch.com
Josh Erickson	Education	(989) 345-0500	11/30/24	ericksonwbplanning@westbranch.com
Rusty Showalter	Recreation	(989) 345-0500	11/30/26	showalterwbcouncil@westbranch.com
Yvonne DeRosio	Transportation	(989) 345-0500	11/30/24	derosowbplanning@westbranch.com
Kara Fachting	Residential	(989) 345-0500	11/30/26	fachtingwbplanning@westbranch.com
Bob David	Industrial/ commerce	(989) 345-0500	11/30/25	davidwbplanning@westbranch.com

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS MEMBERS

The Zoning Board of Appeals is responsible for hearing appeals on administrative planning and zoning decisions and/or Planning Commission decisions. They are the final board of appeal within the City. All meetings are public and are scheduled as needed. There were two (2) Board of Appeals meeting in 2023. Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals include:

Name	Office	Phone	Term
Kara Fachting	Chair, Planning Commission	(989) 345-0500	Planning Term
Mike Jackson	City Council Member	(989) 345-0500	Council Term
Jozann Burgin	Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/24
Thom Jones	Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/25
Glenda Colclasure	Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/26
Karen Briggs	Alternate Member	(989) 345-0500	08/12/26

Training of Planning Commissioners in 2023

- Rusty Showalter and Mike Jackson attended the MML conference.
- All Members participated in a two-part series on the Michigan Planning and Enabling Act put on by MAP (Michigan Association of Planners).

Development Reviews by Planning Commission in 2023

TYPE	NAME	PROJECT	APPROVAL STATUS	DATE OF MEETING
Special Use	Richard Wing	Commercial marijuana facility building	Approved as submitted	1/10/23
Site Plan Review	Alexander Limited Partnership	Remodel of commercial building	Approved as submitted with historical setback allowance	4/11/23
Special Use	Richard Wing	Commercial marijuana facility building	Approved as submitted	4/14/23
Special Use	Northern Gems Therapy	Remodel of Commercial building	Approved as submitted	8/22/23

Variances by Planning Commission in 2022

Sign Variance	West Branch Pharmacy	Height and size variance	Approved as submitted	7/25/23
Sign Variance	West Branch Provisioning Center	Size variance	Approved with the condition of temporary approval for 30 days	10/10/23

Actions by Legislative Body in 2023

- The Commission on two separate occasions recommended changes to the zoning ordinance which would rezone a handful of properties throughout the City to account for uses that were more practical for the areas they were located in. The first public hearing to take comment on the changes was held on July 25th. After the close of the public hearing, the Commission approved the recommendation of Ordinance 23-01 of 2023. The ordinance was officially enacted by Council on August 21st with it taking effect on September 6th. The second public hearing to take comment on the changes was held November 7th. After the close of the public hearing, the Commission approved the recommendation of Ordinance 23-02 of 2023. The ordinance was officially enacted by Council on December 4th with it taking effect on December 21st. A summary of the changes to the zoning ordinance were as follows:
 - Changed zoning of parcels #052-625-002-01, #052-625-002-02, and #052-625-002-03 from Multiple Family Residential to Industrial.
 - Changed zoning of parcel #052-462-009-00 from Central Business District to Mixed-Use District.
 - Changed zoning of parcels #052-108-003-00, #052-108-004-00, #052-108-005-00, and #052-108-006-00 from Single Family Residential to Mixed Use.

Master Plan

The Planning Commission completed an update to the Master Plan with the assistance of Denise Cline of the North East Michigan Council of Governments (NEMCOG). The final draft was approved by Council on March 4, 2019. The annual review of the Masterplan was completed on July 25th. No changes to the Masterplan were submitted. The Commission will look at doing a full update to the plan in 2024.

6-Year Capital Improvement Plan

A new six-year plan was reviewed and approved on January 10. The new plan will be good from 2023-2028.

Public Participation Plan

A summary of events that included public participation was as follows:

- January 10, 2023. The Planning Commission held a public hearing to take comment on a special use plan for a marijuana retail facility.
- January 23, 2023. The Recreation Committee closed a survey to take comments on the proposed 2023-2027 recreation plan. The survey was made available through the City's Facebook page, website, and at City Hall and requested recommendations on what type of recreation they wanted to see the City focus on.
- February 20, 2023. City Council held a public hearing to take comment on the creation of an Obsolete Property Rehabilitation District.
- March 15, 2023. An open house was held at the City Police Department to review plans and take comments on the MDOT Houghton Ave redesign plans.

- April 14, 2023. The Planning Commission held a public hearing to take comment on a special use plan for a marijuana retail facility.
- May 15, 2023. Council held a public hearing to take comment on a DWSRF grant. The grant focused on water infrastructure upgrades,
- May 15, 2023. Council held a public hearing to take comment on a DNR Spark grant. The grant focused on the construction of a downtown park called the “Gathering Place”.
- June 5, 2023. City Council held a public hearing to take comments on proposed changes to sewer rates. The proposed increase was \$.05/1,000 gallons.
- July 25, 2023. The Planning Commission held a public hearing to take comment on changes to the zoning ordinance. The changes would rezone a handful of parcels in the City.
- August 22, 2023. The Planning Commission held a public hearing to take comment on a special use permit.
- November 7, 2023. The Planning Commission held a public hearing to take comment on changes to the zoning ordinance. The proposed changes would change the zoning classification of various City properties and amend the table of uses.

Community Vision

Over the next 20 years, the City of West Branch will continue to develop a broader array of services available to residents, businesses, and tourists—with the aim of making West Branch a great place to live, work and play—while still maintaining West Branch’s small-town charm and original Americana hometown atmosphere. In working towards meeting these goals, the City of West Branch Planning Commission will continue to do all it can to improve the City of West Branch, by promoting a desirable residential community, making available a range of housing options, supporting a mix of both small and mid-sized businesses that serve residents and visitors alike, while also working to expand employment opportunities for residents of the City and the region as a whole. Parks and cultural facilities will be expanded, improved, and beautified. The City will continue to work with neighboring communities to provide more efficient services and improved facilities. In addition, the City will also work to maximize the potential of the great entrepreneurial spirit of the hardworking people in our region, as well as the enormous natural beauty that surrounds our area in abundance.

GOAL 1: REDEVELOP THE CITY’S DOWNTOWN INTO A REGIONAL SHOPPING AND ENTERTAINMENT DESTINATION

The City of West Branch Planning Commission, in collaboration with the City of West Branch Downtown Development Authority, City Council, the City Downtown Retail Merchants Association, and City Administration, as well as the Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation continue to make strides in this area, working towards projects such as a downtown gathering park.

GOAL 2: PROMOTE THE GROWTH OF INDUSTRIAL EMPLOYMENT IN THE CITY AND SURROUNDING AREAS

In 2016, with the support of the Planning Commission, as well as the City Industrial Development Corporation, the City Council for the City of West Branch implemented additional programs centered on allowing tax abatements to encourage development in the City of West Branch Industrial Park. In 2019, the City purchased a seven-acre vacant lot with the intention to expand the size of the park. The lot is currently

being marketed to potential businesses. During 2022, the City welcomed the addition of a commercial building in our office/service park to house the State USDA and Social Security offices.

GOAL 3: ENCOURAGE MORE DIVERSE TYPES OF HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

In 2019, through the Project Rising Tide program, a target market analysis was completed and reviewed by the West Branch Planning Commission to help identify areas of need in housing in our community. In 2019, the City purchased vacant land off of M-30 and issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ), looking for developers to work with the City on a housing development. A developer was approved and during 2020, the City has continued to work with the developer with a ground breaking planned for 2022. Because of rising construction costs and supply chain issues, the development was pushed off until 2023.

GOAL 4: IMPROVE CITY STREETS

The City of West Branch Planning Commission, in conjunction with assistance from City Administration and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), is working to develop a comprehensive, multi-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for City Streets. This plan will continue to be worked on with a long-range focus on the reconstruction of Houghton Ave which was originally scheduled for 2023 and pushed back to 2024 due to supply chain issues. In 2022, the City replaced State St and a portion of N. First St.

GOAL 5: IMPROVE CITY WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

The City began plans and applied for grants to build a new water treatment facility along with the drilling of an additional well. The City is hoping to release the request for bids during the 2023 calendar year. The City also began working with Fleiss and Vandenbrink engineering for the replacement of the main water line running under Houghton Ave that will coincide with MDOT's road reconstruction project scheduled for 2024. With the assistance from City Administration, the City Planning Commission continues to work on Water Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) which is a requirement of the Michigan Environmental, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). The City also began work on replacing lead and galvanized service lines throughout town. The City will look for grants to help update old, undersized, and failing water mains throughout the City.

GOAL 6: IMPROVE CITY SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE

The City Planning Commission with the assistance from City Administration, continues to work on the CIP or AMP for sewer infrastructure for the City of West Branch. The City is continuing to look at storm sewer concerns on N. Fourth St.

GOAL 7: IMPROVE CITY NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The City completed a major sidewalk replacement program of four blocks in the downtown area. The City is currently looking at the addition of a sidewalk that will connect the City's sidewalks to West Branch Townships sidewalks in 2023. This will allow for a complete non-motorized path that will connect the commercial area of West Branch Township to the City's downtown and commercial areas.

GOAL 8: REDEVELOP EXISTING RESIDENTIAL HOUSING WITHIN THE CITY

Started in 2016, the City Planning Commission continues to work with City Administration, City Council and the City's Third-Party Housing Administrator, to offer to all City residents, opportunities for free or low-interest programs to redevelop existing residential housing within the City limits, if the applicants met low-income requirements. In 2021, a grant was obtained to help cover repairs needed for homes for low income residents. The plan was extended into 2022.

GOAL 9: AMEND ZONING CODE TO ALLOW FOR DEVELOPMENT, REDEVELOPMENT, & INCREASED INVESTMENT

The City of West Branch Planning Commission along with the Recreation Committee is scheduled to work on updating the current Recreation Plan to account for changes in the plan since its last update in 2014. The plan should be ready for approval in the beginning of 2023. The Commission completed an amendment to the zoning code to allow for marihuana related businesses.

GOAL 10: PLAN FOR LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY AND PROVISION OF CITY SERVICES

The City of West Branch Planning Commission will continue to work on this issue more closely with City Administration in 2024

2023 Year in Review Summary

During 2023, the Commission twice made recommended changes to the zoning code. The two recommendations changed zoning districts for a few parcels in the City to better zone them for uses that were more practical for the area they were located in and better for the City. The Commission also changed the table of uses for uses allowed by right or by special use. The Commission also reviewed the Masterplan and approved a new Capital Improvement plan. The Commission will continue their ambitious plans to work towards achieving the ten goals listed above.

- The City Planning Commission continued work towards the implementation of the Redevelopment Ready Communities program guidelines, pursuant to the Resolution of Participation in the RRC Program that was passed by the Planning Commission in November of 2015. The Commission will focus their attention to the development of a marketing strategy during the 2024 calendar year
- The Planning Commission continued to hold joint annual meetings with both City Council and the DDA.
- The Planning Commission made recommended changes to the zoning ordinance
- The Planning Commission reviewed the Masterplan and approved a new Capital Improvement Plan.