



2017 Annual Report

for the

City of West Branch *PLANNING COMMISSION*





*“The City
with a Smile”*



City of West Branch Planning Commission

2017 Annual Report

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS

	<i>Term Expiration</i>
Michael (Mike) Jackson , Planning Commissioner, Chair of Planning Commission	12/21/18
June Longstreet , Planning Commissioner	12/31/18
Jan Hasty , Planning Commissioner	12/31/18
Dan Weiler , Planning Commissioner, City Councilman	Council term
Jason (Jayson) Stroebel , Planning Commissioner, DDA Member	12/31/19
Kara Fachting , Planning Commissioner, ZBA Member	12/31/17
Robert (Bob) David , Planning Commissioner	12/31/17
Lisa Jensen , Planning Commissioner, Secretary	12/31/19
Heather Grace , Planning Commissioner, City Manager	Manager term

Prepared by:
City Hall Administration

November 2018

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.

2017 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 2017, the City of West Branch Planning Commission had twelve (12) meetings, which were held on the following dates:

- **January 24th**
- **February 14th**
- **March 14th**
- **April 11th**
- **May 9th**
- **June 27th**
- **July 11th**
- **August 8th**
- **September 12th**
- **October 10th**
- **November 14th**
- **December 12th**

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.

The Duties of the Planning Commissioner

The Planning Commission is responsible for the development and maintenance of the comprehensive plan (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 for 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 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 (located at 121 N. 4th St., West Branch, MI 48661) and begin 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 regularly on our City website at www.westbranch.com.

Planning Commission Members

The City of West Branch Planning Commission is made up of nine (9) members, serving three (3) year terms [with the exception of the City Manager and City Councilmember representatives on the Commission, who serve as long as their Manager or Council terms]. The City Manager member of the Planning Commission is appointed by the City Council. The City Council member of the Planning Commission is elected by the City electorate. The remaining 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 (and optional cover letter) to the City of West Branch Clerk/Treasurer and said applicants will be considered as terms expire and/or when an opening has occurred. In addition to fulfilling the roles of Planning Commissioners, many of our members also serve on various other City boards and committees. The makeup of the City of West Branch Planning Commission during the 2017 calendar year was as follows:

Name	Office	Phone	Term Expiration
Mike Jackson	Chairperson	(989) 345-0500	12/31/18
June Longstreet	Member	(989) 345-0500	12/31/18
Jan Hasty	Member	(989) 345-0500	12/31/18
Dan Weiler	Member	(989) 345-0500	Council Term
Jayson Stroebel	Member	(989) 345-0500	12/31/19
Kara Fachting	Member	(989) 345-0500	12/31/17
Bob David	Member	(989) 345-0500	12/31/17
Lisa Jensen	Member	(989) 345-0500	12/31/19
Heather Grace	Member	(989) 345-0500	Manager Term

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS MEMBERS

The City Commission members serve as the Zoning Board of Appeals. The code allows for the City Commission to appoint a separate Board of Appeals but to date they have chosen to serve in that capacity. The Appeals Board 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 was one (1) Board of Appeals meeting in 2017. Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals include:

Name	Office	Phone	Term
Michael Pugh	Chairperson	(989) 345-0500	08/15/17
Kara Fachting	Plan. Com. Mem.	(989) 345-0500	Plan. Com. Term
Tim Schaiberger	City Council Mem.	(989) 345-0500	Council Term
Anthony Wirth	Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/19
Thom Jones	Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/19
Glenda Colclasure	Alternate Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/17

Training of Planning Commissioners in 2017

- Redevelopment Ready Communities Program – in Clare, attended by Bob David, Kara Fachting, Mike Jackson and Dan Weiler
- Parliamentary Procedure Workshop – in West Branch attended by Bob David and Kara Fachting
- Citizen Planner Workshop – in West Branch attended by Kara Fachting, Dan Weiler, Mike Jackson and Jan Hasty

Development Reviews by Planning Commission in 2017

Site Plan Review	300 W Houghton Ave	Change to restaurant use	Approved with condition	2/14/17
Site Plan Review	443 E Houghton Ave	New shed	Approved as submitted	5/9/17
Site Plan Review	619 W Houghton Ave	Fence	Approved with condition	5/9/17
Site Plan Review	209 W Houghton Ave	Build an addition	Approved as submitted	5/9/17

Variances by Planning Commission in 2017

Sign Variance	503 W Houghton Ave	Allow larger sign	Approved as submitted	1/24/17
Sign Variance	700 Columbus Dr	Allow larger sign	Approved with condition	2/14/17
Sign Variance	700 W Houghton Ave	Allow larger sign	Approved as submitted	2/14/17
Sign Variance	300 W Houghton Ave	Allow non-victorian theme	Approved as submitted	7/11/17
Sign Variance	205 W Houghton Ave	Allow larger sign	Approved as submitted	7/11/17
Sign Variance	700 Columbus Dr	Allow larger sign	Approved with condition	7/11/17
Sign Variance	314 W Houghton Ave	Allow larger sign	Approved as submitted	8/8/17
Sign Variance	619 W Houghton Ave	Temporary Banner	Approved as submitted	11/14/17
Sign Variance	209 W Houghton Ave	Allow larger sign	Approved as submitted	12/12/17

Actions by Legislative Body in 2017

- Planning Commissioners drafted and Approved Planning Commission Job Descriptions for any vacancies.
- Noise Ordinance updates were recommended to City Council.

Master Plan

The Planning Commission discussed making updates to the Zoning map to include the Multi-Use District and to expand the Office District. The 2014 Master Plan was utilized throughout 2015 and the 2016 calendar year by the City of West Branch Planning Commission, and proved to be a useful planning tool. The Planning Commission has been working closely with NEMSCA to update areas of the Master Plan for 2018.

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 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 Authority and the Michigan Economic Development Authority continue to make strides in this area, working towards projects such as MEDC sponsored DDA Façade Grants, pocket park development, etc.

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 around allowing tax abatements to encourage development in the City of West Branch Industrial Park.

GOAL 3: ENCOURAGE MORE DIVERSE TYPES OF HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

In 2016, the City of West Branch Planning Commission reviewed a Target Market Analysis that has been previously ordered by the City Council, to help identify areas of need in housing in our community. These issues are scheduled to be further discussed and addressed in the 2017 calendar year.

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 is scheduled to be completed during the 2017 calendar year.

GOAL 5: IMPROVE CITY WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

With assistance from City Administration, the City Planning Commission approved a Water Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for submission to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). This Water CIP is scheduled to be added to a comprehensive, multi-infrastructure CIP during the 2017 calendar year. In addition, the Planning Commission, City Administration, and City Council are also scheduled to develop and approve a Water Asset Management Plan (AMP) during the 2017 calendar year as well.

GOAL 6: IMPROVE CITY SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE

The City Planning Commission has not yet began the development of a CIP or AMP for sewer infrastructure for the City of West Branch. However, a sewer CIP is slated for development and approval during the 2017 calendar year, and the sewer AMP is slated for approval during the 2018 calendar year.

GOAL 7: IMPROVE CITY NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The City Planning Commission has worked with MDOT towards participating with our local school districts in the “Safe Routes to School” initiative to add additional sidewalks in our area. This project is scheduled to begin in earnest during 2017, and is anticipated to be completed during the 2018 calendar year. In addition, the City Planning Commission is also working on amending the City Zoning Code to include “Complete Streets” provision and address additional non-motorized transportation infrastructure issues. The City CIP that is scheduled to be developed and accepted in 2017 is also slated to include non-motorized transportation areas of concern.

GOAL 8: REDEVELOP EXISTING RESIDENTIAL HOUSING WITHIN THE CITY

In 2016, the City Planning Commission worked with City Administration, who in turn worked with 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.

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

The City of West Branch Planning Commission is scheduled to drastically revise the City of West Branch Zoning Code in 2017 to address issues of concern that have been limiting development and redevelopment in the City. In addition, the City Planning Commission is scheduled to consider a switch to a form-based code in 2017.

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

The City of West Branch Planning Commission is scheduled to work on this issue more closely with City Administration in 2017.

2017 Year in Review Summary

Though the City of West Branch Planning Commission continues to have many ambitious plans to work towards achieving the ten goals listed above, a great deal of progress towards achieving those these goals was made during the 2017 calendar year:

- A new mixed-use commercial/residential district was added to the City, through an amendment to the City Zoning Ordinances so as to allow future development, redevelopment, and increased commercial investment in the City.
- The Zoning Code was also amended to lessen parking restrictions in the City's industrial district so as to allow the redevelopment of an abandoned indoor tennis court building into a new and expanded recreation center, which now hosts multi-team tournaments and brings in additional tourism and revenue to the region.
- A proposal to allow residential uses on the first-floor in the downtown Central Business District was considered (such use is already allowed, but denied, as it did not align with the Planning Commission's strategic vision and goals for future development of the downtown area—which includes the encouragement of additional retail and commercial services in the downtown so as to promote the area as a regional shopping destination).
- The Zoning Code was amended to allow for brew pubs and distilleries via special use permit in the Central Business District, to encourage the redevelopment of previously vacant storefronts downtown—which immediately led to a new brewery submitting for and getting approval for a special use permit to open a brewpub/eatery downtown, which is slated to open in the late Fall/early Winter of 2017.
- A comprehensive City Tran Plan, prepared by City Administration, was reviewed, modified, and subsequently approved by the Planning Commission, and thereby recommended for approval to the City Council—which also chose to approve and implement the new Plan—thereby assisting with the development of plans for long-term sustainability of City infrastructure and services (since city treescaping are a form of infrastructure, as well as an important component of the overall attractiveness and walkability of a City).
- The City Planning Commission also 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.