



2018 Annual Report



City of West Branch Planning Commission

2018 Annual Report

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS

	<i>Term Expiration</i>
Michael (Mike) Jackson , Planning Commissioner	Council Term
Corine Lucynski , Planning Commissioner	11/30/19
Jan Hasty , Planning Commissioner	11/30/19
Dan Weiler , Planning Commissioner	Council Term
Evelyn Schenk , Planning Commissioner	1/30/20
Kara Fachting , Planning Commissioner	11/30/20
Robert (Bob) David , Planning Commissioner, Chair	11/30/19
Lisa Jensen , Planning Commissioner, Secretary	11/30/20
Denise Lawrence , Mayor	Mayor Term

Prepared by:

City Hall Administration

February 2019

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.

2018 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 2018, the City of West Branch Planning Commission had meetings on the following dates:

- **January 9th**
- **January 23rd**
- **February 27th**
- **March 13th**
- **March 27th**
- **April 10th**
- **May 22nd**
- **June 4th**
- **June 26th**
- **July 10th**
- **July 24th**
- **August 28th**
- **September 25th**
- **October 23rd**
- **November 13th**
- **December 11th**

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 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, 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 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 Councilmember representatives on the Commission, who serve as long as their Council terms]. The eight 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. The makeup of the City of West Branch Planning Commission during the 2018 calendar year was as follows:

Name	Office	Phone	Term Expiration
Mike Jackson	Member	(989) 345-0500	Council Term
Corine Lucynski	Member	(989) 345-0500	11/30/19
Jan Hasty	Member	(989) 345-0500	11/30/19
Dan Weiler	Member	(989) 345-0500	Council Term
Evelyn Schenk	Member	(989) 345-0500	11/30/20
Kara Fachting	Member	(989) 345-0500	11/30/20
Bob David	Chair	(989) 345-0500	11/30/19
Lisa Jensen	Member	(989) 345-0500	11/30/20
Denise Lawrence	Member	(989) 345-0500	Mayor Term

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 was one (1) Board of Appeals meeting in 2018. Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals include:

Name	Office	Phone	Term
Kara Fachting	Chair, Planning Commission	(989) 345-0500	Planning Term
Tim Schaiberger	City Council Member	(989) 345-0500	Council Term
Anthony Wirth	Alternate Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/19
Thom Jones	Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/19
Glenda Colclasure	Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/20

Training of Planning Commissioners in 2018

- Redevelopment Ready Communities Program – in Clare, attended by Bob David, Kara Faching, Mike Jackson and Dan Weiler
- Parliamentary Procedure Workshop – in West Branch attended by Bob David, Mike Jackson, and Kara Faching
- Citizen Planner Workshop – in West Branch attended by Kara Faching, Dan Weiler, Mike Jackson and Jan Hasty
- Training at Edwards Township attended by Denise Lawrence and Kara Faching

Development Reviews by Planning Commission in 2018

Site Plan Review	2110 S M 76	Human Care facility	Approved with conditions	4/24/18
Site Plan Review	2463 S. M-30	Human Care facility	Approved as submitted	6/12/18
Site Plan Review	651 Columbus	Loading Dock	Approved as submitted	6/12/18
Site Plan Review	511 E Griffin	Accessory/structure Bus Shelter	Approved with condition	11/13/18

Variances by Planning Commission in 2018

Special Use	Lot 7 in the Industrial Park Refinery & Cook	Build Transfer Station Facility	Approved with condition	1/23/18
Sign Variance	2110 S M 76	Allow more signs	Approved as submitted	1/23/18
Amendment to the zoning code	Vacant lot S 1 st St	Lower the minimum square footage allowed in a PUD	Denied	4/24/18
Special Use	2463 S M 30	Operate a Human Care operation	Approved as submitted	6/12/18
Amendment to the zoning code and Special Use	152 N 4 th St	Allow Professional Service	Approved	6/12/18
Sign Variance	511 E Houghton	Allow larger	Approved as	6/12/18

	Ave	sign	submitted	
Sign Variance	214 W Houghton Ave	Allow larger sign/disregard theme	Approved as submitted	9/11/18
Sign Variance	417 W Houghton Ave	Temporary Banner	Approved as submitted	11/13/18
Sign Variance	314 W Houghton Ave	Temporary Banner	Approved	12/11/18

Actions by Legislative Body in 2018

- Approved changes to the Planning Commission bylaws
- Approved the changing of the zoning code to allow professional services as a use by special permit in residential zoned districts.

Master Plan

The Planning Commission worked on a complete update to the Master Plan with the assistance of Denise Cline of the North East Council of Governments (NEMCOG). A final draft is anticipated for approval by Council in the beginning of 2019

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 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 on 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 will continue to be a focus during the upcoming calendar year with a new housing market analysis to be worked on during 2018 and completed in the beginning of 2019.

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 is scheduled for 2023.

GOAL 5: IMPROVE CITY WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

With assistance from City Administration, the City Planning Commission continues to work on Water Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) which is a requirement of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ).

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 and AMP is slated for development during the 2019 calendar year.

GOAL 7: IMPROVE CITY NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The City Planning Commission has looked into the possibility of working with MDOT and our local school districts in the "Safe Routes to School" initiative to add additional sidewalks in our area. This project will be looked at more closely during 2019. 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.

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 working on a total rewrite of the zoning code in order to streamline the zoning process in order to encourage development and redevelopment in the City

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 2019.

2018 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 2018 calendar year:

- A new master plan was developed with the help of Denise Cline of the North East Council of Governments (NEMCOG). A final draft is anticipated for approval by Council in the beginning of 2019
- The Planning Commission updated its bylaws to fall in line with recent changes by the State.
- The Planning Commission worked with the City on a public input survey which focused on what the community would like to see for the future of West Branch including road, infrastructure, and community service concerns.
- The Zoning Code was amended to allow for professional services to be allowed by special permit in residential districts. The zoning code change allowed for an older building which was in the residential district but bordered the downtown district to be redeveloped for a future professional service business.
- 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. An updated public participation plan was implemented with the assistance of NEMCOG.
- A total rewrite of the current zoning code was developed with the help of Denise Cline of the North East Council of Governments (NEMCOG). A final draft is anticipated for approval by Council in the beginning of 2019
- The Planning Commission continued to hold joint annual meetings with both City Council and the DDA.