

CITY OF
West Branch
PLANNING COMMISSION

2019
Annual Report



City of West Branch Planning Commission

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PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS

	<i>Term Expiration</i>
Michael (Mike) Jackson , Planning Commissioner	Council Term
Corine Lucynski , Planning Commissioner Chair	11/30/22
Rusty Showalter , Planning Commissioner	11/30/20
Chris Powley , Planning Commissioner	11/30/21
Kara Fachting , Planning Commissioner Secretary	11/30/20
Robert (Bob) David , Planning Commissioner Vice Chair	11/30/22
Vacant seat , Planning Commissioner	11/30/21

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.

2019 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 2019, the City of West Branch Planning Commission had meetings on the following dates:

- **January 8th**
- **January 22rd**
- **February 4th**
- **February 26th**
- **March 12th**
- **March 26th**
- **April 23rd**
- **May 28th**
- **June 11th**
- **July 9th**
- **August 13th**
- **September 10th**
- **October 17th**
- **November 12th**
- **December 10th**

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 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 (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 2019 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	11/30/22	lucynskiwbplanning@westbranch.com
Chris Powley	Education	(989) 345-0500	11/30/21	powleywbcouncil@westbranch.com
Rusty Showalter	Recreation	(989) 345-0500	11/30/20	showalterwbplanning@westbranch.com
Vacant	Transportation	(989) 345-0500	11/30/21	
Kara Fachting	Residential	(989) 345-0500	11/30/20	fachtingwbplanning@westbranch.com
Bob David	Industrial/ commerce	(989) 345-0500	11/30/22	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 no (0) Board of Appeals meeting in 2019. Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals include:

Name	Office	Phone	Term
Kara Fachting	Chair, Planning Commission	(989) 345-0500	Planning Term
Ellen Pugh	City Council Member	(989) 345-0500	Council Term
Anthony Wirth	Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/22
Thom Jones	Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/20
Glenda Colclasure	Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/21

Training of Planning Commissioners in 2019

- Mike Jackson MML training
- No other trainings were done in 2019 due to the large amount of extra work and meetings required in order to update the Masterplan and a complete rewrite of the zoning ordinance. Training requirements will be resumed in 2020.

Development Reviews by Planning Commission in 2019

Site Plan Review	Stephenson & Co 203 S. Second St	Professional office	Approved as submitted	7/9/19
Site Plan Review	Jeff Marvin 240 W. Wright St	Professional office addition	Approved as submitted	6/12/18

Variances by Planning Commission in 2019

Sign Variance	Bucilli's Pizza	Larger square footage	Approved as submitted	1/22/19
Sign Variance	Mid Michigan Health	Number of signs	Approved as submitted	1/22/19
Sign Variance	A&B Coffehouse & Cafe	Larger square footage and font	Approved as submitted	6/11/19
Sign Variance	Harvest Grill	Large square footage	Approved as submitted	6/11/19
Sign Variance	Cuzins Cycle	Large square footage	Approved as submitted	7/9/19
Sign Variance	West Branch Greenhouse	Large square footage	Approved with conditions	6/12/18
Sign Variance	214 W Houghton Ave	Allow larger sign/disregard theme	Approved as submitted	9/11/18

Actions by Legislative Body in 2019

- Approved an updated Masterplan
- Approved changes to the zoning map, future land use map, and a total rewrite of zoning code.

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.

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 2020, the City will look at expanding the size of its industrial park.

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 will continue to work with the developer for the start of a housing project in the spring of 2020.

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

Water improvements were made in 2019 with continued ongoing improvements being planned for 2020 including the possibility of adding a water treatment plant and additional well. 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 Environmental, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE).

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. However, a sewer CIP and AMP is slated for development during the 2019 calendar year. A major sewer repair on N. Fourth is planned for 2020.

GOAL 7: IMPROVE CITY NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The City Planning Commission continues to look 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 2020 with a sidewalk analysis being done with the help of students from the West Branch School District.

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.

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.

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 2020.

2019 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 2019 calendar year:

- A new master plan was revised and adopted with the help of Denise Cline of the North East Council of Governments (NEMCOG). A final draft was approved by City Council on March 4.
- 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.
- A total rewrite of the current zoning code was completed 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 2020
- The Planning Commission continued to hold joint annual meetings with both City Council and the DDA.
- The Planning Commission updated its bylaws to reduce the number of board members from nine (9) to seven (7) members.