

CITY OF
West Branch
PLANNING COMMISSION

2021
Annual Report



City of West Branch Planning Commission

2020 Annual Report

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	11/30/23
Josh Erickson , Planning Commissioner	11/30/24
Kara Fachting , Planning Commissioner	11/30/23
Robert (Bob) David , Planning Commissioner Vice Chair	11/30/22
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.

2021 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 2021, the City of West Branch Planning Commission had meetings on the following dates:

- **January 12th**
- **February 1st**
- **February 9th**
- **March 9th**
- **March 23rd**
- **April 13th**
- **May 11th**
- **June 8th**
- **August 10th**
- **September 14th**
- **October 12th**
- **November 9th**
- **December 14th**

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 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 2021 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
Josh Erickson	Education	(989) 345-0500	11/30/24	ericksonwbplanning@westbranch.com
Rusty Showalter	Recreation	(989) 345-0500	11/30/23	showalterwbcouncil@westbranch.com
Yvonne DeRoso	Transportation	(989) 345-0500	11/30/24	derosowbplanning@westbranch.com
Kara Fachting	Residential	(989) 345-0500	11/30/23	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 was one (1) Board of Appeals meeting in 2021. All members also attended a training on zoning essentials. 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	08/15/22
Thom Jones	Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/24
Glenda Colclasure	Member	(989) 345-0500	08/15/23

Training of Planning Commissioners in 2021

- Rusty Showalter attended the MML conference.
- All members attended two training hosted by the Michigan Association of Planners.
 - March 23rd, Planning and zoning essentials.
 - December 14th, Site plan review workshop

Development Reviews by Planning Commission in 2021

Site Plan Review	Deshano Construction	Commercial building	Approved with conditions	2/9/21
PUD	Bart Blystone	Multi-family housing development	Approved as submitted	2/9/21
Site Plan Review	Kelly Jones– Showroom Auto Detailing	Accessory building to a commercial business	Approved as submitted	3/23/21
Site Plan Review	Mid-Michigan Health	Wound Care center	Approved as submitted	4/13/21
Site Plan Review	Mid-Michigan Health	Wound Care center modification	Approved as submitted	5/11/21
Site Plan Review	Brian Rang	Addition to a storage facility	Approved with conditions	8/10/21
Site Plan Review	Mid-Michigan Health	Walk in Clinic	Approved as submitted	10/12/21
Special Use	Mid-Michigan Health	Walk in Clinic	Approved as submitted	11/9/21
Site Plan Review	Kelly Jones- Showroom Auto Detailing	Accessory building modification	Approved as submitted	11/9/21

Variances by Planning Commission in 2021

Sign Variance	Cottage Village Design	Sail-type banner	Approved as submitted	6/8/21
Sign Variance	Loggers Depot	Sail-type banner	Approved as submitted	6/8/21

Sign Variance	Ann's Hair Affair	Sail-type banner	Approved with conditions	9/14/21
Sign Variance	Made in the USA	Sign extended 6' above the top of the building	Approved with conditions	10/12/21

Actions by Legislative Body in 2021

- Worked with the City on the plans for the reconstruction of Houghton Ave that is scheduled for 2023.
- The Commission continued to review how the zoning rewrite was performing and made recommendations to the Council for changes. Council approved the following changes to the zoning ordinance based on the Planning Commission's recommendations:
 1. Change the sign ordinance to require all "Sail-type" banners in the Central Business District to be submitted to the Commission for approval.
 2. Change the zoning on Houghton Ave from Sixth St to M-30 from Central Business District to Mixed Use District.
 3. Change zoning on M-30 from Wright St. to Columbus from Office/Service District to Mixed Use District.
 4. Change the fencing requirements for commercial uses in the Mixed-Use district to allow taller fences, fences in the front yard, and chain link fencing.
 5. Change the sign ordinance to no allow "Sail-type" banners in the Central Business District (effective after the road reconstruction in 2023) and to allow "Sail-type" banners in the Mixed-Use district for commercial uses.

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 approval by Council on March 4, 2019. The annual review of the Masterplan was completed on April 13th.

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.

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.

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. In 2021, the City replaced a large section of road on S. Fourth St extending from Wright St to Morrison St.

GOAL 5: IMPROVE CITY WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Water improvements were made in 2021 with the replacement of water main running on S. Fourth St. The City also 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 2022 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 2023. 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).

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 2022 calendar year. A major sewer repair on N. Fourth is planned for 2024

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. The project was looked into during the 2021 year but no plans to proceed with the program are currently in the works.

The City will continue to explore the idea in future years. The City did a major sidewalk replacement and removed and repoured sidewalks on four blocks in the downtown area.

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.

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 will continue to work on this issue more closely with City Administration in 2022

2021 Year in Review Summary

Despite still dealing with COVID issues, the City of West Branch Planning Commission was able to conduct meetings again while following the recommended guidelines. The Commission was extremely busy as they had to deal with a significant increase in site plan approvals with five new buildings and a PUD being approved. The Commission worked with Planning Consultant, Denise Cline, on potential zoning changes that would be needed if the City were to opt into allowing marijuana facilities. The Commission will continue their ambitious plans to work towards achieving the ten goals listed above while still following recommended guidelines to deal with the pandemic.

- 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 Planning Commission continued to hold joint annual meetings with both City Council and the DDA.
- The Planning Commission joined in the City Council Goal subcommittees.
- The Planning Commission made changes to the zoning ordinance
- The Planning Commission began their annual group training program.