



2023 Annual Report

Van Buren County Planning Commission

1. Introduction

The Van Buren County Planning Commission is charged with the duty of guiding and facilitating orderly development within the county. Its key responsibilities include developing and periodically updating the master plan, conducting comprehensive studies on current conditions and projected growth, and ensuring effective collaboration with neighboring jurisdictions to maintain consistency in planning efforts. The commission also oversees zoning reviews of the townships and fosters public understanding through educational initiatives. By maintaining transparency through public meetings and detailed annual reports, the commission ensures that development aligns with the community's health, safety, and welfare goals.

This year, board members continued their professional development, participating in various training, including the Michigan State University Extension Citizen Planner Course, enhancing their capabilities in guiding community development. We extend our deepest gratitude to all members for their dedication and commendable service.

2. Purpose of this Report

As mandated by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, this annual report details the operations and status of planning activities within Van Buren County. This report serves multiple purposes:

- Fosters enhanced communication between the staff, boards, commissions, and the legislative body.
- Assists in anticipating and preparing for future community needs and budgeting considerations.
- Offers an opportunity to acknowledge and thank our board and commission members for their invaluable contributions to our community's development and well-being.

3. Membership

The membership of the Planning Commission consists of dedicated community members whose terms are scheduled as follows:

Name	Position	Term Expiration
Jan Petersen	Chair	Term Expires: 3/31/2026
Scott Cedarquist	Vice Chair	Term Expires: 4/1/2026
Tony Hemenway	Member	Term Expires: 4/1/2024
Barbara Rose	Member	Term Expires: 3/31/2026
Pam Stermer	Member	Term Expires: 4/1/2024
Celinda Gilmore	Member	Term Expires: 4/1/2025
Tom Motycka	Member	Term Expires: 4/1/2025
Will Pugsley	Member	Term Expires: 4/1/2025
Alyssa Hosbein	Secretary	Term Expires: 4/1/2026
Kurt Doroh	VBC Commissioner	Board Representative
VACANT	Member	Term Expires: 4/1/2024

Cedarquist was appointed to serve on the Land Preservation Board to represent the County Planning Commission.

4. Meetings

This year, the Planning Commission convened for 10 meetings, thereby meeting the minimum requirement set forth by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, which mandates at least four meetings annually.

5. Master Plan Review

Throughout the year, there were discussions about zoning and text amendments which, while not always directly mentioning the county master plan, relate to its broader objectives of managing growth and land use in a manner that promotes public health, safety, and welfare.

These discussions throughout the year illustrate the commission's active engagement in overseeing and refining local plans and ordinances to ensure they are coherent with the county's broader developmental objectives as outlined in the County Master Plan. This involves detailed oversight of amendments and updates to local plans, emphasizing consistency, accuracy, and alignment with county-wide planning goals.

6. Actions by the Legislative Body

These actions encompass decisions on zoning changes, text amendments, and actions addressing specific master plans and ordinances. Each motion was supported by multiple members, reflecting a collective decision-making process focused on local planning and zoning adjustments.

A. Decatur Township Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment (January 25, 2023)

- a. Subject: Large Solar Energy Facilities
- b. Action: Concurred with amended zoning.

B. Paw Paw Township Zoning Ordinance Text Amendments (January 25, 2023)

- a. Action: Motion to concur with a question about driveway widths.

C. Lawrence Proposed Text Amendments (July 26, 2023)

- a. Action: Motion not to concur with changes to definitions of Contiguous and Campground Definition.

D. Lawton Master Plan and Zoning (August 23 , 2023)

- a. Action: Motion to concur with recommended review for consistency.

E. Charter Township of South Haven Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment (August 23, 2023)

- a. Action: Motion to concur with text amendment. Passed

F. Hamilton Township Zoning Ordinance (Small Solar) Text Amendment (September 27, 2023)

- a. Action: Motion to concur with the amendment unanimously.

G. Antwerp Township Wellhead Protection Overlay Ordinance (November 29, 2023)

- Action: Motion to concur with the amendment unanimously.

11. Trainings Attended

This year, commission members planned to sponsor a county-wide six-week Citizen Planner course by MSU Extension in the spring of 2024. Petersen attended an American Farmland Trust Preservation Program. In November, a presentation by Tyler Augst was given on the roles and responsibilities of the County Planning Commission, aimed at reinforcing the understanding of planning practices and regulations among members.

12. Engagement with Local Government / Joint Meetings: Throughout the year, reports included updates on local township activities like the Decatur and Hamilton Townships updating their master plans and the approval of new commercial developments in South Haven

13. Other Notable Items

- **Public Transportation and Infrastructure Discussions:** Throughout the year, there were mentions of projects such as broadband expansion, as well as coordination with the Michigan Regional Housing Partnership on a housing study.

This report reflects the broad scope of the Planning Commission's responsibilities, from educational activities for commission members to managing significant personnel changes and overseeing community-responsive projects. Each element plays a role in shaping the functional and strategic direction of the commission's work throughout the year.

In conclusion, this report not only reflects the ongoing efforts and achievements of the Van Buren County Planning Commission but also sets the stage for continued success and community enhancement in the coming year. We are grateful for the dedication of our members and look forward to another productive year.