



CITY OF BUCHANAN PLANNING COMMISSION

TUESDAY, APRIL 14, 2026 – 6:00 PM

CHAMBER OF BUCHANAN CITY HALL - 302 N REDBUD TRAIL, BUCHANAN MI

MINUTES

I. Regular Meeting - Call to Order

Chairman Houser called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

III. Roll Call

PRESENT: Chairman Tony Houser, Vice Chair Jen Garry, Commissioner Dan Vigansky, Peter Lysy, Jacob Brown

ABSENT: Matt Pleasant

CITY STAFF: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director and City Clerk Kalla Langston-Weiss

IV. Approve Agenda

Motion made by Vigansky, seconded by Brown to amend the agenda to add a discussion regarding Design Review under New Business item B. Votes carried unanimously.

Motion made by Lysy, seconded by Brown, to approve the amended agenda. Votes carried unanimously.

V. Public Comments - Agenda Items

There was no public comment.

VI. Approve Minutes

A. Minutes- Consider approving the Regular Meeting Minutes from March 10th, 2026.

Motion was made by Brown, seconded by Lysy, to approve the minutes as presented. Votes carry unanimously.

VII. Old Business

A. Master Plan - One Herd, One Future - Building a Better Buchanan – Update
Staff provided an update on the Master Plan process. The public survey remains open, and cards promoting the survey were distributed to Planning Commission members for further distribution. Staff noted that approximately 135 survey responses had been received as of the prior week.

The Commission discussed continued public outreach, including additional Facebook posts and distribution through local contacts. Staff noted that the June 9, 2026 regular Planning Commission meeting is expected to be used as an open house/workshop rather than a traditional meeting. Marcy is expected to attend the May meeting to review survey results and discuss materials for the June public engagement event.

The Commission also briefly discussed recognizing Ralph's service to the Planning Commission, including the possibility of a plaque or similar recognition.

B. Unified Development Code - Buffering, Tree preservation, landscaping and Fencing - Discussion 2

Staff reviewed proposed amendments and draft language related to fences, lighting, screening, landscaping, tree preservation, and related definitions.

Fences

Staff explained that the current fence regulations are limited and proposed expanded language addressing fence height, post height allowances, placement on private property, clear sightline requirements, finished-side orientation, fence types, materials, and maintenance standards.

The Commission discussed open fences, solid fences, chain link fencing, corner lots, secondary front yards, side yards, and fence height. Staff explained that a solid fence would generally be 50% or less open when viewed at an angle. Staff recommended allowing chain link fencing in side and rear yards while continuing to restrict chain link fencing in front yards.

Staff also discussed adding provisions for public recreational fencing, protective measure fencing, and a fence modification process through the Zoning Board of Appeals. The proposed fence modification process would be less stringent than a full variance process and would include notice to nearby property owners but not newspaper publication. The Commission generally indicated support for the proposed direction on fence regulations.

Lighting

Staff stated that the current ordinance does not include lighting standards and recommended adding standards primarily for commercial properties. The proposed language would require lighting plans or photometric plans and would aim to keep light on the subject property, limit glare, and require fixtures to direct light downward rather than upward.

The Commission discussed streetlights and complaints about light glare into residences. Staff noted that city-controlled downtown lights and AEP-controlled neighborhood lights may be addressed through City Hall or AEP service requests.

Screening

Staff discussed creating clearer screening requirements for mechanical equipment, outdoor storage, and refuse containers. The proposed language would address rooftop and ground-mounted mechanical equipment, screening from public view, outdoor storage screening, and screening for dumpsters, recycling bins, grease bins, and similar refuse containers.

The Commission expressed general support for the proposed direction.

Tree Preservation and Tree Lawn Regulations

Staff explained that existing tree preservation language appears to regulate private trees broadly, including permitting and replacement requirements for certain trees. Staff stated that, after discussions with Tony and the tree group, the likely intent should be focused more on public trees and tree lawn areas rather than individual private property trees.

Staff recommended removing or revising overly broad private tree preservation requirements and instead referencing the existing code provisions related to public trees and tree lawns. Staff also noted that Redevelopment Ready Communities requirements could be met through other green infrastructure provisions, such as permeable pavers, solar panel language, bioswales, rain gardens, and rain barrels.

The Commission supported staff continuing to work on green infrastructure language, including language for rain barrels that prevents standing water and mosquito issues.

Landscaping

Staff reviewed proposed landscaping requirements for properties other than one- and two-family dwellings. The proposed language would address perimeter landscaping, parking lot landscaping, foundation plantings, transitional buffers, berms, retaining walls, and green infrastructure.

Staff discussed thresholds for when landscaping improvements would be required for expansions: no new landscaping for small additions under 25%, targeted improvements for expansions between 25% and 50%, and full compliance for new developments or expansions over 50%.

Staff noted that front yards for new residential homes would still be required to have grass. Staff also discussed reducing certain planting size requirements, including reducing tree caliper requirements from 2.5 inches to 2 inches.

The Commission discussed commercial setbacks, suburban commercial district character, parking placement, and whether future development should encourage buildings closer to the street with parking to the side or rear. Staff noted this could be considered in future ordinance discussions.

Staff stated that several related ordinance amendments may eventually be grouped together for one public hearing process.

Public Hearing Process

The Commission discussed the public hearing process for zoning ordinance amendments. Staff explained that the Planning Commission serves as the review and recommendation body and that zoning amendments then proceed to the City Commission. The City Commission's process includes readings and public hearings to provide public transparency and opportunity for input.

C. Unified Development Code - Section 71-30 Signs

Staff reviewed the draft sign ordinance language that had been discussed over the prior two months and explained that it had been placed into the new ordinance format. Staff noted that additional language was still needed regarding sign permit requirements, including language making clear when Downtown Design Review approval is required. Staff discussed prohibited sign types and areas needing further refinement, including vehicle signs, neon or LED lighting that permanently outlines windows or doors, roof signs, and other illuminated or attention-getting sign features. The Commission reviewed an example of bright exterior lighting around a storefront and discussed concerns that this type of lighting could be distracting or inconsistent with Buchanan's desired character. The Commission generally agreed that permanently installed neon, LED, or similar lighting outlining windows or doors should be restricted or prohibited, while also recognizing the need to distinguish such lighting from temporary holiday decorations and other acceptable decorative lighting. The Commission also discussed roof signs and rooftop display features, including existing recognizable or "iconic" signs or objects. Lowery's rooftop figures were specifically discussed as an example. Staff explained that the current definition of a sign could include objects or displays used to identify or advertise a business. The Commission discussed whether existing iconic signs should be allowed to remain and whether special language should be created for signs or displays that have become part of the community's character.

Staff stated that she would research and draft possible "iconic sign" language, including standards such as age, proof of existence, and a review process, so that existing iconic signs could potentially be addressed without allowing new rooftop signs generally.

The Commission expressed general support for the revised sign ordinance layout and directed staff to continue refining the language, including the provisions related to vehicle signs, illuminated window or door outlines, roof signs, and iconic signs. The draft sign ordinance language will be returned to the Planning Commission for further review

VIII. New Business

A. Discussion - Sections 71-16.G Corner Lot clear sight lines, 771-27 Parking and loading standards and creation of Planned unit development (PUD) process Clear Sight Lines

Staff discussed potential revisions to clear sightline requirements, including measuring clear vision areas from the property corner rather than from the curb, since curbs may change over time. Staff suggested that a 20-foot measurement may be appropriate instead of the current 30-foot standard.

The Commission discussed downtown sightline issues, particularly near Main Street and Oak Street, and noted that existing built conditions downtown may limit what can realistically be changed. Staff also discussed the possibility of adding clear vision requirements near driveways.

Parking and Loading Standards

Staff reviewed parking standards and noted that some provisions may be improved or simplified. The Commission discussed parking minimums, possible parking caps, stormwater impacts from excessive parking, and downtown parking perceptions. Staff stated that downtown appears to have sufficient surface parking, although some users may prefer parking directly in front of their destination.

Planned Unit Development

Staff explained that the prior code included Planned Unit Development provisions, but the current code does not provide a process to create new PUDs. Staff discussed how PUDs can provide flexibility for mixed-use buildings, higher-density housing, condominium projects, affordable housing, reduced setbacks, altered parking placement, building height flexibility, and additional open space or amenities.

The Commission discussed prior concerns about PUDs, including past examples, the difference between PUDs and neighborhood plans, administrative approval, and the need for better education and standards. Staff stated that a PUD process could allow the Planning Commission to review a full plan and recommend waivers to the City Commission, rather than requiring multiple separate variances through the ZBA.

There was a general consensus to continue exploring the creation of a PUD process with clear rules, expectations, and review standards.

B. Downtown Design Review Discussion

Staff reviewed issues related to the Downtown Design Review Committee. Staff explained that the current code makes the Design Review Committee the decision-making body for downtown applications, while staff may administratively review certain items. Staff noted that the code lacks a clear appeal process if the Design Review Committee denies an application.

The Commission discussed whether the Design Review Committee should remain a decision-making body, become a recommending body, or whether the Planning Commission should serve as the appeal body. Staff suggested that, for streamlining purposes, the Design Review Committee could remain the decision-making body, with appeals going to the Planning Commission.

The Commission discussed consistency in Design Review decisions, particularly regarding painted brick, historic preservation standards, and Secretary of the Interior standards. Staff recommended improving the ordinance language and design standards so expectations are clearer for applicants and committee members.

The Commission also discussed the possibility of adding alternate members to the Design Review Committee to help with recusals and ensure broader participation.

Staff will continue working with the Design Review Committee and will bring proposed language back for further Planning Commission review.

IX. Public Comment - Non-Agenda Items Only

X. Zoning & Community Development Director Comments

Gundersen stated that the Commission is moving in the right direction, noting that the process takes time.

XI. Commissioner Comments

Vigansky commented that people can become impatient with the process, but that it takes time to understand the direction of the work. He stated that administration needs the proper tools in place before the Commission can step back from certain details.

Brown thanked staff and the Commission for their work. He stated that the discussion was productive, respectful, and allowed members to share differing opinions without confrontation.

Garry thanked staff for digging into the ordinance details, explaining the issues, and helping the Commission understand how the proposed language would apply specifically to Buchanan.

Houser thanked the Commission and the Staff.

XII. Adjournment

Houser adjourned the meeting at 8:18 PM.

Kalla Langston-Weiss, City Clerk

Chairman Tony Houser