

Who Does What?

ROLE OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

Planning & Zoning Training Series

Planning is a process that guides the current and future development of land. Planning impacts almost every aspect of a community—the location of residential areas, the design and accessibility of businesses, the features of parks, the extent of municipal services, and preservation and protection of natural resources. It is a continuous process as communities prepare for the future, adjust to unanticipated changes, and work toward creating a community that reflects a unique identity and values. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008) updated and consolidated legislation allowing for planning at the local level (the County Planning Act, Township Planning Act, and Municipal Planning Act - all of which were created in the first half of the 20th century).

PRIMARY DUTIES OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

- Prepare, adopt, review, and update the Master Plan
- Prepare recommendations on zoning ordinance text and map amendments.
- Review site plans, planned developments, site condominiums, plats, private roads, land divisions, and other development applications, when authority is assigned by ordinance or other applicable local procedure.
- Review Special Land Uses
- Prepare a Capital Improvement Plan (cities, villages and townships with their own water supply or sewage disposal system)
- Prepare an annual report of Planning Commission activities, recommendations, and operations, as applicable under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act.

PREPARE, ADOPT, REVIEW, AND UPDATE THE MASTER PLAN

The Master Plan is a comprehensive, long-range guide for the future development of a community. It includes an analysis of existing conditions, goals and objectives for future development, specific designation of development policies for land uses, and recommended implementation strategies. The Master Plan is not law - rather, it is a guide for decision-making regarding future development of a community. It is the plan that forms the basis for development of a zoning ordinance. Michigan law authorizes the Planning Commission to adopt the Master Plan unless the legislative body has reserved approval authority.

PREPARE RECOMMENDATIONS ON ZONING ORDINANCE TEXT AND MAP AMENDMENTS.

The planning commission is also responsible for formulating a zoning ordinance to regulate the use of land within a community. The planning commission acts in an advisory capacity to the legislative body, who adopts the zoning ordinance. As law, the zoning ordinance regulates land use within a community. The planning commission's role in the zoning process is to recommend various land use classifications (zoning districts), associated regulations, and mapped locations for each zoning district within the community.

REVIEW SITE PLANS, ETC.

Planning Commissions are given the authority to review various types of development proposals. These include site plan, subdivision (plat), site condominium, lot split and private road reviews. These review procedures vary from community to community, but each is intended to accomplish one overall goal -- insuring that development proposals meet all applicable ordinances before they are approved. The development review process is where implementation of community plans is accomplished by verifying compliance with ordinance provisions before construction or use of land is authorized.

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SPECIAL LAND USE REVIEW

A special land use is a use that the zoning ordinance has determined is appropriate in a zoning district, subject to additional review and specific approval standards. Most Zoning Ordinances authorize the Planning Commission to review specific land uses (SLUs) to ensure their compatibility with adjacent properties and to minimize negative impacts on the community. Special Land Use review allows the Commission to attach conditions to approval of a given use at a given site and is based upon a detailed site plan which becomes an enforceable guarantee as to how the site will be developed. In many communities, the Planning Commission, as opposed to the legislative body, takes final action. There are some important benefits of authorizing final SLU action by Planning Commission:

- Special land-use decisions apply adopted standards to a specific proposal, unlike rezonings, zoning-text amendments, and other legislative actions that establish community-wide policy.
- Planning Commissions routinely evaluate applications, staff reports, site plans, technical studies, and public comments. Their review addresses compatibility, circulation, access, screening, lighting, noise, environmental features, public services, and conformance with adopted plans and zoning standards.
- Review by both the Planning Commission and legislative body commonly requires two public meetings, repeated staff and applicant presentations, and two separate decisions applying the same ordinance standards to the same proposal.
- Although a two-step process may suit unusually complex local systems, it often adds time, cost, and uncertainty. The legislative body has already established the governing policy through adoption of the ordinance.

PREPARE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

In cities, villages as well as townships with their own water supply or sewage disposal system, Planning Commissions shall annually prepare a program of public structures and improvements to be undertaken over the next six years. City departments are to provide the Planning Commission with lists, plans, and time and cost estimates for public improvements. The Commission then uses this data to establish a comprehensive coordinated program for public improvements.

PREPARE ANNUAL REPORT

The Planning Commission is required by the MPEA to prepare an annual report describing its operations, recommendations, development-review activity, and progress toward implementation of the Master Plan. The report can help the legislative body and public understand planning trends, development activity, infrastructure needs, ordinance issues, and future work priorities.

OTHER: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND TRAINING

Planning Commissions provide a formal forum for public participation in long-range planning, zoning amendments, and certain development applications. Public comment informs the Commission's understanding of local conditions and concerns; however, decisions must be based on the applicable law, adopted plans, ordinance standards, and evidence in the record.

Planning Commission service involves important responsibilities and a significant investment of time. The community should encourage participation in training opportunities and recognize commissioners for their service in guiding long-term planning, reviewing development proposals, and helping protect the community's health, safety, welfare, and character.

Giffels Webster will help you identify and leverage your unique resources to improve the assets and attractiveness of your community. Whether it is increased walkability and connectivity, better streetscape design and parking, more natural settings and gathering places or other changes to enrich your city, we will work in partnership with you on how to attract and retain businesses and residents. As your municipal partner, we also review submitted site plans, conduct inspections, maintain records, prepare master plans, lead the planning, and construction administration process for capital improvement projects. For more information please call us at **866.271.9663** and visit **www.giffelswebster.com**