



Planning Commission
Annual Report
2021

INTRODUCTION

The [Michigan Planning Enabling Act](#) (MPEA) allows for the establishment of local Planning Commissions, Master Plans, and other associated activities. The City of Escanaba's Planning Commission is established in the city code of ordinances in Chapter 21, Article II and consists of 7 members. The Planning Commission is responsible for:

- Developing the community's Master Plan which provides a framework for orderly growth and redevelopment.
- Creating a zoning ordinance to translate master planning goals to land use regulations.
- Reviewing and approving development requests.
- Drafting a capital improvements plan.
- Studying special topics or conducting other special projects as requested by the governing body.

MEMBERSHIP

Planning Commission members for this reporting period were:

Seat	Name	Member Since	Term Exp.	Attendance		Training Hours Logged (4 required)
1	Brian Black	2/7/13	06/01/21	4/4	(100%)	--
	David Mason	9/2/21	06/01/24	4/4	(100%)	3
2	James Hellermann, Chair	1/13/14	06/01/24	11/11	(100%)	2
3	Christine Williams	2/21/13	Resigned 1/14/21	--	--	--
	Tyler Anthony	12/16/21	6/1/22	--	--	--
4	Richard Clark	1/19/17	06/01/22	10/11	(91%)	18
5	Nevin Naser	1/7/21	06/01/23	11/11	(100%)	--
6	Dominic Benetti, Secretary	2/1/18	06/01/23	7/11	(64%)	4
7	Mark Hannemann	8/6/20	06/01/23	10/11	(91%)	7

MEETINGS

The MPEA requires that local Planning Commissions meet at least four times a year. The Planning Commission meets regularly on the second Thursday of each month and held 11 regular meetings this year. April's meeting was re-scheduled to the last Thursday of the month to accommodate City Council's change in schedule, and then subsequently cancelled due to lack of quorum.

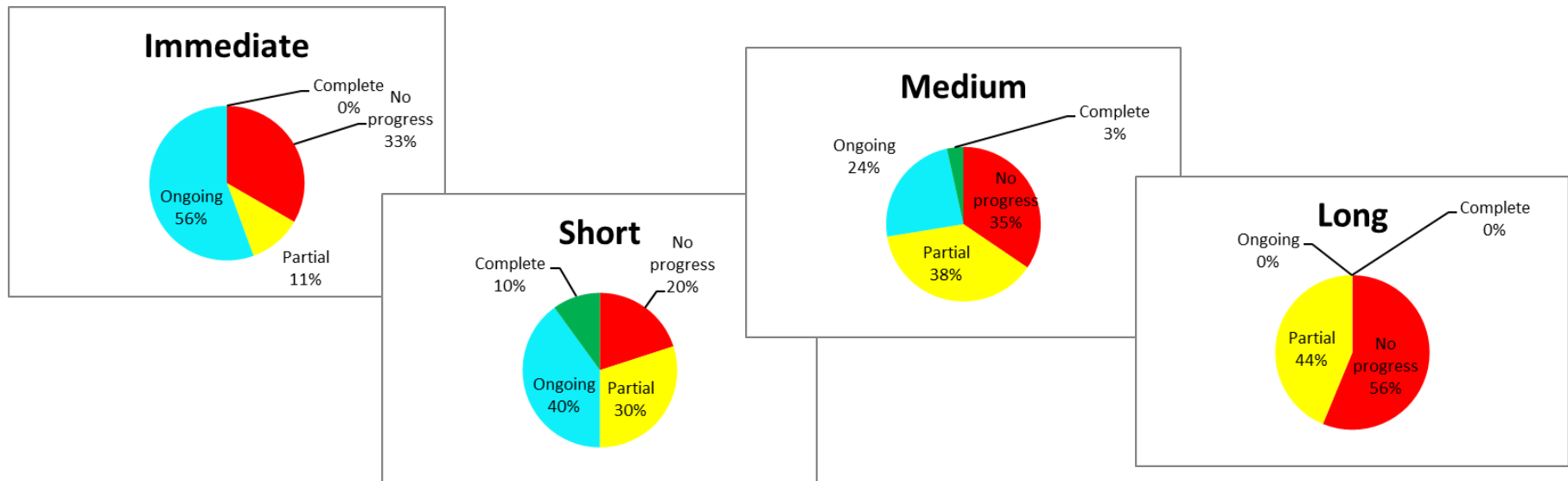
A Joint Meeting with City Council, Planning Commission, Downtown Development Authority, and Historic District Commission took place on October 13, 2021. Christopher Germain of MEDC presented his findings on the City's Redevelopment Ready Community re-certification status.

MASTER PLAN REVIEW

The Planning Commission is responsible for regularly reviewing and updating the master plan to ensure it continues to be relevant to the community's needs. The community's current master plan was adopted in 2016. The MPEA requires a formal review (and update or reaffirmation) occur at least every five years. The Planning Commission performed a 5-year review in May 2021 and affirmed that the current plan was adequate.

Attached to this report is a matrix outlining all of the goals, objectives, and actions of the Master Plan. Attempts were made to document progress to date with specific comments from the various departments involved. The following charts show the summarized completion statuses of the 66 action items:

Color	Status	Economy	Housing	Natural Resources	Land Use	Facilities & Services	Recreation	Transport	Total	%
	No Progress	10	1	3	0	0	2	8	24	36%
	Partial Completion	11	3	2	1	0	3	3	23	35%
	Complete	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3%
	Ongoing (no definable completion point)	5	1	0	0	4	6	1	17	26%
	TOTAL ACTION ITEMS	27	5	5	1	4	12	12	66	100%



While some sort of progress has been reported on a number of actions in 2021, none of them achieved a “complete” status. The number of actions that have no discernable completion point continues to be problematic. Additionally, the city is lacking a strategic plan to implement the goals in a coordinated way between City Council, City Boards/Commissions, City Departments, and outside agencies.

ANNUAL MASTER PLAN REVIEW QUESTIONS			
CRITERIA	YES	NO	Comments
Have development patterns changed significantly since the plan was written and adopted?	X		Some of the area set aside for Regional Retail on the Future Land Use Map has seen recent development (Meijer and Aldi), but still has room for additional developments. The expansion of utilities and roadway into the 9 th Avenue North are between North Lincoln Road and North 30 th Street is becoming a more urgent need.
Does the adopted zoning ordinance align with the goals of the plan?		X	We need to work on developing a mixed-use district that will surround the downtown area. We also need to continue to consider ways to encourage additional types of missing-middle housing throughout the city.
Have there been any major changes, such as utility lines, major road improvements, large development approvals, etc.?	X		The addition of the Parkview Assisted Living Facility along Willow Creek Road has presented some challenges with utilities that are being worked out for this particular development. However, more work will be needed on utilities planning in the nearby residential areas as expansion occurs in this area.
Have there been instances when the Planning Commission or elected body has departed from the plan?	X		When expanding the E3 – Central Commercial District, it was decided that the northern and southern boundaries would not go all the way to 1 st Avenues North and South like the Future Land Use Map indicated, but rather would end at the alleys. The other halves of those blocks would instead be incorporated into a surrounding Mixed-Use District in the near future. Additionally, the east/west boundaries were slightly modified also.
Are the goals and priorities of the plan in sync with the goals and priorities of appointed and elected officials?		X	There needs to be discussion about historic preservation activities, specifically the balance between fulfilling the Master Plan goals of increasing protection of historic properties versus the desire not to burden the property owner with additional requirements. Additionally, there does not seem to be an intentional effort to work toward achieving Master Plan goals outside of the Planning Commission's work. A proposed solution is to hold an annual Joint Meeting of development-related boards in February each year to not only review the annual reports, but also the Master Plan goals and objectives, giving greater opportunity for the City Manager, City Council, and all boards to select priorities for the coming year and tying these into action plans, accountability milestones, and budget allocations.
Does the plan address the location and types of land uses frequently requested?	X		
Have there been other studies completed that change the relevancy of the plan?	X		The Five-Year Recreation Plan was updated in 2021.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN REVIEW

The Planning Commission is responsible for recommending a prioritized Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to City Council. The CIP ties planning goals to budgetary investments over the next six years. Following are the CIP projects completed this year:

Department	Project Description
Water/Wastewater	Water Plant Mag Meter Replacements Replace existing water meters (4" & 16") at Water Plant, and integrate with the current SCADA program.
Water/ Wastewater	Chlorine Scale Replacement Replace existing Chlorine Scales at Water Plant.
Water/ Wastewater	Distribution Service Vehicle Purchase an additional distribution service vehicle to support additional staffing due to Lead Service Line Replacement activities.
Water/ Wastewater	BOD Incubator Replace existing aging unit.
Water/ Wastewater	Locator for Under Ground Pipe/ Cable Purchase a new locator for conducting Miss-dig work.
Recreation	Tennis Court Replacement - Ludington Park Replacement of the Ludington Park Tennis Courts (four courts total). Proposal would be reconstruction to have universal courts with pickleball and tennis.
DDA	Market Place Commercial Kitchen Upgrade the Marketplace kitchen so it can be utilized as a commercial kitchen by vendors and possible incubator projects.



The annual CIP update is done in tandem with the budget process. Department Heads begin updating existing project information and submitting new project requests in January. The City Manager, City Controller, and Planning & Zoning Administrator compile, review, and prioritize those requests in February. The Planning Commission reviews the prioritized draft in March/April and then makes a recommendation to City Council. City Council reviews and adopts the CIP along with the budget in May.

ZONING ORDINANCE TEXT AMENDMENTS & REZONINGS

Zoning is the legal mechanism which turns planning goals into reality via development regulations. It is imperative that a community maintain an up-to-date zoning ordinance which aligns with those goals and addresses emerging trends. Throughout the year, the Planning Commission discussed the following amendments:

Topic	Summary	PC Recommend Date	City Council Approval Date	Ord. #
Chapter 18 – Site and Sketch Plan Standards	Notify all property owners within 300’ of a property undergoing site plan review, regardless of whether a Public Hearing is required or not.	2/11/21	3/18/21	#1241
Chapter 20 – Signs	Message board regulations, de-branding/removal of obsolete signs, and variance standards for signs.	2/11/21	3/18/21	#1242
Chapter 19 – Development Standards, Section 1907.1 - Canopies	Remove development standards for canopies.	5/13/21	8/5/21	#1251
Chapter 21 – Central Commercial District	Simplify use categories, add hotels and multi-family housing types as Special Land Uses, establish a front setback “build to” range, require parking lots be located in the rear yard only, remove specific sign standards and refer to sign ordinance chapter instead, require front-facing doorways, and rename the district.	6/10/21	9/2/21	#1252
Chapter 17 – Parking & Circulation	Remove off-street parking requirements for all non-residential uses, re-organize and clarify parking layout and design regulations, and add temporary loading area alternatives.	7/8/21	9/2/21	#1253

The Planning Commission is also responsible for making recommendations on rezoning requests. Such requests must align with the master plan’s future land use map. Following are the re-zonings that occurred this year:

Address/Area	Summary	PC Recommend Date	City Council Approval Date	Ord. #
E3 Central Commercial District	77 parcels along the Ludington Street corridor were rezoned to E3 – Central Commercial to expand the downtown district so that it extends from 2 nd Street to 15 th Street.	9/9/21	11/4/21	#1254

Based on discussions regarding the need to increase housing options, it has been determined that the next major area of focus for large-scale re-zoning would be the area immediately surround the newly expanded E3 – Central Commercial (downtown) district, which would mostly be recommended for a mixed-use district.

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION REVIEWS

Site plan review is a primary role of the Planning Commission and helps ensure that new development in the community aligns with the zoning ordinance requirements. Prior to Planning Commission review, staff conducts an internal review process as well. Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) have an additional layer of review and approval by City Council.

Project type	Location	Description	Status	Date of Action
R-PUD Site Plan Review	516 Willow Creek Road	Parkview Assisted Living and Memory Care/Parkview Cottages	PC recommended approval with conditions to City Council	2/11/21
			City Council approved with conditions.	4/8/21
Home Occupation Use	3201 6 th Avenue South	Residential Home Occupation	Approved loading/reloading of ammunition as a home occupation.	2/11/21
Special Land Use	1900 South Lincoln Road	Dollar General	Denied Special Land Use request for a retail store within the D – Local Business District.	6/10/21
Site Plan Review	539 North Lincoln Road	Taco Bell	Approved the site plan for a building addition and parking circulation modifications as presented.	9/9/21
Site Plan Review	309 North Lincoln Road (to be 225 North Lincoln Road when parcel splits)	Medical Office	Approved the site plan for a 3,515 s.f. medical office building.	10/14/21
Special Land Use	1027 North Lincoln Road	Fairgrounds/ Chamber of Commerce	Approved Special Land Use permit for two detached pylon signs with electronic message centers on the parcel.	11/11/21

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS ACTIVITY

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) is tasked with hearing appeals, zoning ordinance interpretations, and variance requests. It consists of seven members, plus two alternates who would be assigned to a case in the event a regular member is absent or has a conflict of interest. There are currently two vacancies on the ZBA that need to be filled: one for a regular member, and one for an alternate member.

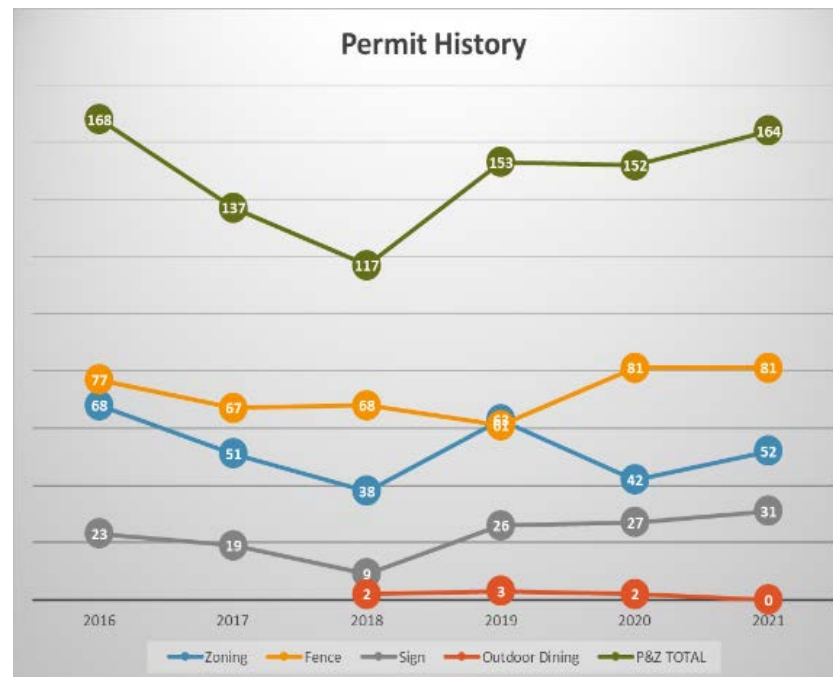
The ZBA meets quarterly on the first Tuesday of January, April, July, and October for regular meetings, and can be called for special meetings between. Two regular meetings were held in 2021, both of which were used for training and housekeeping business.

No cases for appeals, interpretations, or variance requests were heard by the Zoning Board of Appeals in 2021.

PERMIT ACTIVITY

While large-scale zoning permits and Special Land Uses are reviewed as site plans by the Planning Commission, the Zoning Administrator is authorized to review and make decisions on most small-scale zoning permits, fence permits, and sign permits. Following is a summary of all land use permit activity for the year.

Permit Type	# Approved	Value	# Denied	Reasons for Denial
Zoning – Large Scale	5	\$3,980,000	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special Land Use Not Approved Proposed Structures in Easements Use Not Permitted in District Accessory Structures Prohibited in Front Yard Space
Zoning – Small Scale	47	\$3,557,740	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exceeding Lot Coverage Maximum (3) Inadequate Distance Between Structures Side Setback Not Met Accessory Structures Prohibited in Front Yard Space
Fence	81	\$171,214	---	--
Sign	31	---	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projection Distance & Clearance Height Not Met Exceeding Maximum Copy Area
Outdoor Dining	--	---	---	--
TOTALS	164	\$7,708,954	8	--



ZONING VIOLATIONS

Enforcement of the zoning ordinance is critical to maintaining the integrity of the adopted ordinances. It is intended that most violations are handled through a simple owner notification, followed by a voluntary plan to bring the violation into compliance. Serious infractions or prolonged non-compliance may be enforced with municipal civil infraction citations.

Following is a summary of zoning ordinance enforcement cases for the year:

Type	Open	Closed	TOTAL
Easement Encroachment	2	--	2
Fence	1	4	5
Sign	3	3	6
Zoning	6	6	12
TOTAL	12	13	25

Citations Issued – 8

District Court Hearings – 3

Sign Ordinance Enforcement:

It has become evident that many signs throughout the city have been installed without a sign permit. With a permit, a sign would be considered legal nonconforming (“grandfathered in”), giving it legal right to continue as approved in the permit even if it did not meet current ordinance regulations. However, without a valid permit on file, a sign cannot be confirmed legal nonconforming (“grandfathered in”), and instead would be considered a violation, meaning enforcement action must be used to bring the sign into compliance with current ordinances through the permit process, or be removed.

Recognizing that:

- Some signs have existed in a state of violation for quite some time;
- The city has not consistently identified nor taken enforcement action on these types of violations in the past;
- The city wants to protect its right to enforce its sign ordinance in the future while continuing to move signs into greater compliance with current ordinances;

an amnesty policy/plan has been proposed to allow for a grace period to get existing signs (including the re-facing of existing sign structures) permitted and legally protected, within certain parameters. It is anticipated this process will take 12-24 months, after which full enforcement of the sign ordinance will occur.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Redevelopment Ready Communities Best Practice 1.4 includes an annual summary of public engagement activity in the community, guided by the community's goals and tools outlined in an adopted Public Participation Plan; The City of Escanaba's Public Participation Plan was last updated and adopted in February 2020.

Planning Commission Public Engagement	Jan. 14	Feb. 11	Mar. 11	May 13	Jun. 10	Jul. 8	Aug. 12	Sep. 9	Oct. 14	Nov. 11	Dec. 9	Total
Attendance by General Public (not part of commission, staff, or applicants)	10	6	1	2	8	2	0	0	0	0	0	29
Public Comment on Agenda Items	1	3	0	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	10
General Public Comment	4	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	7
Zoning Ordinance Amendments												
# of Public Hearings	0	2	0	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	7
# of Comments	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	5
Development Projects												
# of Public Hearings	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
# of Comments	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	6

Resilient Ludington Street Project

An interactive workshop event was held over Labor Day Weekend that encouraged public input on a Resilient Ludington Street and on the 5-Year Recreation Plan. Despite the rain, nearly 100 people participated. For the Resilient Ludington Street portion, 118 votes were cast on the main street concepts presented, with the following components being the most popular:

- 1) Adding Green Infrastructure
- 2) Providing Street Furniture
- 3) Providing Lighting
- 4) Creating Medians
- 5) Tree-Lined Streets



TRAININGS RELATED TO PLANNING, ZONING, AND DEVELOPMENT

		Planning Comm.					ZBA					Historic Dist. Comm.					City Council					DDA							City Staff						
Date	Title/Topic	Benetti, Dominic	Clark, Richard	Hannemann, Mark (& ZBA)	Hellermann, James	Mason, David	Naser, Nevin	Curran, Don (& HDC)	Klem, Joe	Liss, Jon	Thorsen, Brian	Wayne, Jim	Eisenberger, Suzell	Fouts, Judith	Keller, Elizabeth	Lindquist, Karen	Morrison, Monte	O'Donnell, Ellie	Blasier, Ralph	Dubord, Tyler	Moore, Karen	O'Connell, Peggy	Tall, Marc	Ammel, Mark	Bender, Dan	Berg, Peggy	Johnson, Tyler	Parker, Sue	Spaulding, Curt	Walker, Tony	Czasak, Scott	Jordan, Patrick	Calouette, Heather	Spencer, Roxanne	
Nov. 2020 (Recording)	From Exclusive to Inclusive: The Evolving Single Family Zone		2		2																														
Jan. 5	Zoning Essentials & ZBA Basics			1				1			1	1										1											1		
Feb. 1	RRC 2.0 Training Online																																	1.5	
Mar. 10 & 11	Site Plan Review																																	4	
Mar. 18	Benefits of CLG Program																																	1	
Mar. 30 & 31	Master Planning Process			4																														4	
Apr. - Jun.	RRC Virtual Academy		12																	12														12	
May 12	MI Sign Guidebook		2																															2	
May 20	Shoreline Planning	1																																1	
Jun. 8-10	MCP Academy																																	7	
Jun. 17	Nonconformities	1																																1	
Sep. 16	Planning & Zoning for Electric Vehicles	1																																1	
Oct. 5	Conducting Public Meetings			1		1		1		1	1	1																						1	
Oct. 5	ARPA Local Gov't Funding		2																																
Oct. 13	RRC Training (Joint Meeting)			1		1		1					1	1			1		1	1	1		1	1	1	1		1			1	1		1	
Oct. 21	Assessing & Zoning																																	1	
Oct. 27-29	MAP Annual Conference																																	13	
Nov. 18	Attainable Housing	1				1																												1	
Dec. 8	Home Occupations																																	2	
Dec. 16	Revitalization & Placemaking Program																																	1	
TOTAL HOURS		4	18	7	2	3	0	3	0	1	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	13	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	53.5

PLANNING COMMISSION GOALS/WORK PLAN

2021 Goals	Status
1. Determine course of action for loosening restrictions on housing options by possibly combining residential districts, incorporating form-based rather than density-based regulations.	IN PROGRESS. Several ordinance amendment recommendations to increase housing options are scheduled for public hearing in January, to be followed by City Council review and adoption in February/March. A mixed-use district will be created in the coming year.
2. Overhaul Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map based on outcome of #1 and the results of the 2019 Zoning Audit.	ON HOLD due to budgetary concerns. Instead, recommendations for amendments have been handled internally in smaller portions at a slower pace until funding is made available.
3. Perform an in-depth 5-year review of the Master Plan to determine if either minor or significant updates are needed in 2022.	COMPLETE. After review, it was decided that the Master Plan was affirmed as is, with no updates needed at this time.

2022 Goals/Work Plan

1. **Create a mixed-use district** for the near-downtown areas, including zoning ordinance text and re-zoning of parcels to form the district boundaries.
2. Continue to **amend the Zoning Ordinance** in small portions to address the 2019 Zoning Audit findings and to continue to improve the clarity, organization, and user-friendliness of it. If funding is made available in the budget, begin the process of hiring a consultant to assist in doing a complete overhaul.
3. **Revisit the Sidewalk Infill Plan** with City Council to improve walkability throughout the city.